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Exposed

Hate crime:
the grim truth

Dry Martinez

Francesca on tour

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January 2008

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NEWSSTAND DISTRIBUTION

If you have problems obtaining Disability Now through your newsagent or supermarket, visit <http://availability.mmcltd.co.uk> for the nearest stockist or call MMC on 01483 211 222

ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

Disability Now is also available on cassette, disk or via email from Talking Newspaper Enterprises
Tel: 01435 862 737; www.tnauk.org.uk

Published by Scope, a registered charity, no 208231.

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Printed and distributed by Engage Group.

www.engagegroup.co.uk

ISSN 0958-4676

The magazine has been printed on recycled, FSC-certified paper.



20,856
1/7/05 - 30/6/06



editorial

Unappealing victims, unmentionable villains

Earlier this year, Channel 4 TV found itself unintentionally amid a storm of controversy, having transmitted a documentary entitled *Aged 12 And Looking After The Family*. The programme centred on Paul and Amanda Craig, blind parents of six children, the oldest of whom were 12 and 10. The programme maker was genuinely concerned to show the plight of these two young girls who, from her point of view, were caring for their younger siblings because their parents were essentially incapable of doing so. At the time, I was producing *In Touch* for BBC Radio 4 and, the day after transmission of the film, I arrived at work to find an inbox bulging with outrage and indignation. One of the main reasons was that in highlighting the plight of the young carers, the programme had failed to look in any depth at the reasons for that plight.

Now the *Sunday Times* is going down a similar route with its Christmas Appeal, asking people to give money to help children who are also carers. This risks creating dangerous assumptions. The parents will at best be perceived as helpless and

hapless victims of their impairment; at worst as cynically exploiting their children. In order for such an appeal to have maximum impact, the children must be shown as down-trodden, oppressed, sad, even depressed (as with the Channel 4 programme); in

“The charitable approach thus creates victims but fails to produce the true villain”

effect, slaves. While the children may be all of these things, anyone challenging the approach can easily be portrayed as heartless, uncaring and heedless of the needs of these poor carers.

The charitable approach thus creates victims but fails to produce the true villain. Disabled parents do not choose to have their children care for them. They end up in that situation because the level of support available is woefully inadequate. As is so often the case, the system is failing both the parents and the children. But, as is also often the way, it suits the charitable agenda to leave that system not just unchallenged, but completely unmentioned.

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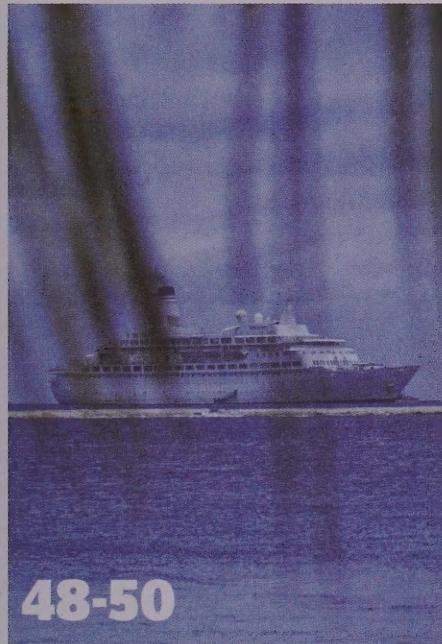
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newsview

Zero tolerance

Alfred Hitchcock, one of London's most senior police officers, talks to **Katharine Quarmby** about changing police attitudes to hate crime

"There is a whole group of people who just do not accept difference and they are racist and homophobic and they hate disabled people. They are obnoxious and objectionable and in many cases they are criminals." So speaks one of London's most senior police officers, deputy assistant commissioner Alfred Hitchcock (*pictured above right*), who leads on hate crime for the Metropolitan Police Service (Met).

I interview DAC Hitchcock and detective sergeant David MacNaghten, from the Violent Crimes Taskforce, which investigates hate crimes, at a security-conscious Scotland Yard.

Britain was appalled by the racially-motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 and the incompetent police investigation that followed.

The subsequent Macpherson report dubbed the Met "institutionally racist". Independent advisory groups on race and homophobia were set up soon after and police attitudes towards hate crimes shifted. Reporting of



incidents and offences increased as trust grew. So, too, did "sanctioned" detection rates – last year, 37 per cent of racist incidents led to a charge, caution, or other action, such as the aggravating nature of the offence being taken into account, or a crime being recorded or a suspect being identified, compared to 15 per cent in 1999, with much the same rise in detection rates for homophobic incidents. But disability hate crime remained ignored.

DAC Hitchcock says: "There has been a significant focus on race and homophobia and that work is fairly well-established, but disability needs to be raised to that level of awareness. But it is catch-up."

I show DAC Hitchcock and DS MacNaghten the dossier of hate crime cases

we have collected (see pages 19–24), and tell them that hardly any were investigated as hate crimes. They are not surprised by the scale of the problem – or the police response.

DAC Hitchcock says: "It's the same for most police forces around the country – there is still room for improvement. When we have identified a crime as disability-related, I think we do appropriately and adequately investigate it, but the difficulty is always with the least experienced staff dealing with the incident and recognising it as a potential hate crime."

The Met hears the views of disabled Londoners through the disability independent advisory group (DIAG). Last month, I met DIAG's co-chairs, Anne Novis and Ruth Bashall. Most DIAG members have experienced hate crime, they told me, and many were dissatisfied with the police response. Disabled people are routinely asked intimate questions when they visit police stations to report crimes. DAC Hitchcock and DS MacNaghten are clearly embarrassed.

DS MacNaghten says: "We took those questions from the legislation but they don't inform us of how we should respond policing-wise. So we have completely overhauled it and have now just four

categories – physical disability, learning difficulty, sensory impairment and mental health problems." These changes will be implemented next year.

The Met is attempting to transform its services for disabled Londoners. A taskforce scrutinises the case handling of every identified disability hate crime. Two police stations in every borough are now fully accessible. And, by next year, every disability hate crime will be "disaggregated" and flagged separately on the Met's computer system. This will provide the first reliable set of police statistics

“We have a key responsibility to bring those who commit hate crime to justice”

relating to reported disability hate crime.

Hitchcock and MacNaghten are enthusiastic about *Disability Now's* campaign. DAC Hitchcock says: "We are very supportive of where you are going. We have a key responsibility to bring offenders to justice, especially people who commit hate crimes. If possible, we can use the additional aggravating factor to make sure that the sentence is appropriate."

breakingnews

Right to sign denied

Elizabeth Choppin

Deaf people are being denied basic rights in the criminal justice system, says a campaigner.

Diana Smith, chair of the Legal Issues Group of the Association of Lipspeakers, said deaf and hearing-impaired people are sometimes hand-cuffed with their hands behind their backs or appear in court without a language service professional (LSP).

Others spend hours in cells without access to an LSP, and BSL-speakers have no legal right to have their statement recorded visually through an interpreter.

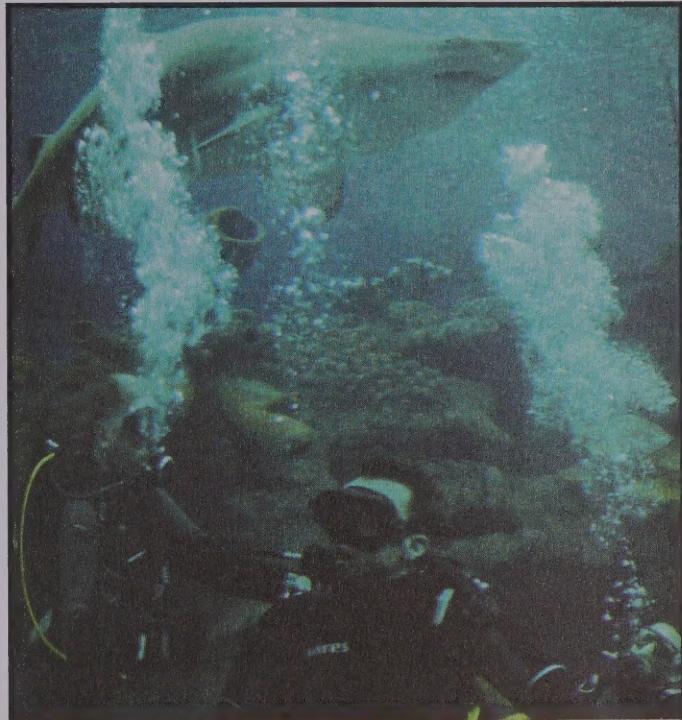
Ms Smith said many deaf

people have to wait to give evidence during an investigation because of a lack of both trained LSPs and police funding.

One police officer was unable to find an interpreter for a deaf woman who had been assaulted, causing a six-week wait to investigate the allegations.

Ms Smith called for improvements in a consultation on changes to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, to be published in March.

A Home Office spokesperson said that her comments were "helpful" and it was aiming to meet soon with her and "other stakeholders".



OXFORD HOIST

Wheelchair champ swims with sharks

Champion wheelchair athlete Jason Richards couldn't resist a dip in shark-infested waters after learning that Oxford Hoist had donated a hoist to the shark tank at Chester's Blue Planet aquarium. He is pictured with diving instructors Fraser Bathgate (*left*) and Rob Bennett (*right*).

Campaigners slate welfare-to-work proposals

Disability campaigners have condemned a raft of measures which the government says will move disabled people off benefits and into work.

In late November, as part of its strategy to reform the welfare system, the government announced:

- a consultation on plans to improve support for disabled people in job centres;
- a new training programme

to help nurses prepare patients to return to work;

- a trebling of the number of employment advisers in GP surgeries;
- the pilot of a new advice and support service for businesses, as part of a new national mental health and work strategy
- welfare-to-work contractors to be paid according to the number of people they place in jobs

and the length of time they stay in those jobs.

Work and pensions secretary Peter Hain said his welfare-to-work priority was "what works best and providing value for money for taxpayers".

But Simone Aspis, of the United Kingdom's Disabled People's Council, said the government's aim was to push "disabled people into low-paid, low-skilled jobs".

She added: "There will not be any motivation to support disabled people, to [help them to] develop career plans so they can get into the jobs that they want to do."

Paul Treloar, of Disability Alliance, said he had been disappointed by the government's approach to reform and its talk of a "sicknote" culture among benefit claimants.

newsroundup

Council cuts 'breached woman's human rights'

A local council's failings confined a severely disabled woman to her bedroom for two years, an ombudsman's report found.

Leeds City Council helped the woman to apply for a disabled facilities grant to fund adaptations to her home.

But the grants section in a different department disputed whether all the work was necessary.

The local government ombudsman's report criticised the council for

failing to recognise its legal duties to rehouse her or pay for adaptations to her home.

Liz Sayce, chief executive of RADAR, said: "It is absolutely unacceptable that in our society individuals are deprived of dignity, and denied their rights to participate in society, because social care budgets are being squeezed by councils struggling to balance their books and arguing over who should pay."



All in a day's work for Dame Tanni...

Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson opened London's first Changing Places public toilet, to mark the International Day of Disabled People on 3 December. The high-tech toilet, in Victoria Embankment, includes a height-adjustable changing bench and a hoist.

28 Remploy factories will close or merge

The government approved the closure of 17 Remploy factories and the merger of another 11.

And it warned that the remaining factories would only stay open if the company made "satisfactory progress" towards reducing costs.

Remploy's original plans would have seen 32 factories closed and another 11 merged, out of a total of 83 that employ 5,000 disabled people.

But following trades union pressure, Remploy submitted a new plan on 12 November, which was accepted by the government.

The plan guarantees no compulsory redundancies for disabled workers, and promises that disabled workers who move into new jobs will have all their terms and conditions protected.

Jon Sparkes, Scope's chief executive, said: "We welcome the government's announcement, which will support more disabled people into mainstream employment rather than being segregated from their non-disabled colleagues."

"We understand that there is still a need to support those people who are currently employed in a sheltered workplace but we hope that this type of

employment will be gradually phased out as society continues to increase opportunities for disabled people."

SEN cash 'being used for school repairs'

A children's charity raised concerns that money earmarked for special educational needs (SEN) provision in mainstream schools was being used to fund general improvements.

Network 81 said more SEN funding was being delegated to head teachers but there was less and less accountability in terms of how they spend the money.

Network 81 chair Eirwen Grenfell-Essam said: "It just goes into the pot with everything else. It could be the new carpark, it could be seating, it could be anything."

Shadow children's secretary Michael Gove said it was a "profoundly worrying" situation and urged the government to look into the extent of the problem and take steps to address it.

A spokesman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families said the budget for SEN support had risen by around £2 billion since 2001. He added: "By law, schools and local authorities must take all reasonable action to

support any pupil with SEN.

"We have issued clear guidance on the monitoring and accountability arrangements that local authorities should put in place to ensure that their needs are being met."

Disability charity discriminated against blind volunteer

A disability charity that failed to provide written material in an accessible format to a blind volunteer was ordered by a court to pay her compensation.

Alison Blackburn, from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, began volunteering as a campaign worker for Diabetes UK in 2000.

But despite repeated requests, Diabetes UK failed to provide her with campaign leaflets and magazines in large print or on tape.

A judge told Newcastle County Court that Diabetes UK had discriminated against Ms Blackburn under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The court awarded her £1,000 compensation plus £300 costs.

Diabetes UK said the court ruled in its favour on two of four central claims, but it regretted that it had not been able to meet all of Ms Blackburn's requirements.

EHRC criticises reform plans

The new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has criticised the government's plans to reform anti-discrimination law.

The existing disability equality duty states that public authorities must pay due regard to the promotion of equality for disabled people in every area of their work.

But government plans would scrap the duty and allow public authorities to set their own priority objectives.

The EHRC said: "This has the potential to shunt the concept of equality from the core business of public authorities to the margins."



... who also met RADAR's People of the Year

A website devised by young people with disfigurements won RADAR's People of the Year young persons award. Pictured is Becky McKenzie-Knight (*far right*), of the young people's council of charity Changing Faces (CF), which launched www.iface.org.uk, with CF's James Partridge and Helen Smith, and Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson.

Councils tighten eligibility for care

Nearly three-quarters of English councils are restricting social care support to disabled people with very high levels of need, according to new figures.

The data, provided to the charity Mencap by the Commission for Social Care Inspection, shows the number of councils which are planning only to support disabled people with substantial or critical needs rose from 53 per cent in 2005-06 to 62 per cent last year.

By the end of this year, more than 73 per cent of councils predict that they will have tightened eligibility criteria to those with substantial or critical needs.

And three councils – Northumberland, West Berkshire and Wokingham – have said they will only provide social care services to people with a "critical need", the highest of the four levels set by the government.

Only two councils – Sunderland and Calderdale

– said they will provide care to people with the lowest level of need.

Dame Jo Williams, co-chair of the Learning Disability Coalition and chief executive of Mencap, said: "These figures show the true extent of the crisis in social care. Last month, the government gave an increase of less than one per cent for social services, and given rises in demand we will just see more and more cash-strapped councils cutting back."

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mediawatch

The Heat is on Harvey



REX FEATURES

Jordan with son, Harvey

Well done to *Heat*, who have made themselves even more unpopular than one of their own targets, Heather Mills. The weekly magazine's recent give-away was a detachable sheet of stickers poking fun at celebs like Britney Spears – "Mum of the year", and Victoria "Posh Spice" Beckham – "Posh, will you fucking smile?"

Another sticker, which got under everyone's radar but ours, said: "I'm not on drugs, it's my bi-polar medicine." Blimey! Pass the needle and thread so I can sew my sides back up.

In a further lapse of taste and judgement, *Heat* also

included a sticker featuring a picture of model Jordan's disabled son Harvey, with the legend, "Harvey wants to eat me".

Not that we're given to schadenfreude in *Disability Now*'s operational hub, but we reckon this cheap stunt got exactly what it deserved. A massive public raspberry, even on *Heat*'s own message board, and numerous complaints to the Press Complaints Commission, including one from Jordan herself. And quite right, too.

Maybe it would cool them down if everyone who was angry over this boycotted the magazine for a month.

CAPTURED

SOTS law

Radio 2 presenter Brian Matthew recently described a requester to *Sounds of the Sixties* (SOTS) as "unsighted". He went on to give not only her name, but her address and the fact that she lived alone. Brian, with old mates like you to look after her, she doesn't need enemies.

Hardy annuals

In a re-run of one of his *Speaks To The Nation* shows (BBC7), Jeremy Hardy gave an outing to an old gag. "Jesus is credited with making the lame walk. Mind you, London Transport can claim to do the same."

Auntie's latest bloomer

According to a story in *The Stage*, at a recent Equity conference on diversity, a representative from BBC Drama said they would, from now on, pledge to treat disabled actors equally in the auditioning and casting process. And not before time, says an exasperated Mat Fraser (right), who told *Disability Now*: "I've been going to events like this and hearing the same thing for the past 11 years." And things, he says, haven't got that much better. "If you

want me to give you it in percentage terms, I'd say things are 10 per cent better now than they were 10 years ago."

Jonathan Keble, who's done a lot of radio drama and is shortly to return as rapist Gareth Taylor in Radio 4's *The Archers*, said he'd always found it difficult to get work in television. "I went up for a part as a solicitor and didn't get it, because they didn't think a disabled solicitor would be right. That's

ridiculous; there are loads of disabled solicitors in real life. Casting should reflect that."

And Francesca Martinez also says that previous fine words have buttered no parsnips. "For too long I've sat in meetings with them and said, 'It's your duty. All your hours of output over a year, and you haven't got one disabled person on there. That's shocking.'"

What seems truly shocking is that with an entire unit devoted to



NIALA CALV

creating and implementing diversity policies, and with an executive for diversity as part of the divisional management for BBC TV, they're still having to pledge that, only now, will they start treating disabled actors equally.

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politics



Scotland's hate crime catch-up

As *Disability Now* launches its hate crime campaign, **James Elder-Woodward** says Scotland is still a little off the pace

Green MSP Patrick Harvie has successfully persuaded the Scottish Parliament (right) to debate his new Sentencing of Offences Aggravated by Prejudice (Scotland) Bill, early next year, without any further periods of consultation.

The new law, if it is passed, will allow judges to give out harsher sentences to those perpetrating hate crimes against groups including disabled people; bringing them in line with race and religion (and a provision already available to courts in England and Wales).

Dr Ann Wilson, chair of Inclusion Scotland, which represents 68 organisations of disabled people throughout Scotland, says: "Hate crime against minority groups is a peculiarly nasty side of modern life. The lack of legislation highlighting society's repugnance of hate crime towards disabled people, in particular, shows that we are still not valued as equal citizens, who have much to contribute. Diversity should be celebrated not hated."

But there is no guarantee

that it will be passed because it has not got the backing of either the Scottish Labour or Conservative Parties. They are now arguing that sentencing should be equal for everyone. This is despite the last Scottish Labour government saying they would implement the recommendations of their own working group on hate crime in 2004 which called for harsher sentences for offences against minority groups, including disabled people, as soon as possible.

The lack of legislation shows we are still not valued as equal citizens

In the same year as the working group carried out its own consultation the Disability Rights Commission, in collaboration with Capability Scotland, published a survey on hate crime against disabled people. This indicated that there was widespread experience of hate crime in relation to disability.

Some of the findings from the 160 people covered were quite startling:



- 73 per cent reported being frightened or attacked by verbal abuse and intimidation
- 33 per cent reported physical attacks
- 47 per cent attributed the hate crime to their disability
- 90 per cent told someone about the attack, with 40 per cent informing the police, who were perceived as unable to help due to the difficulties in providing proof and, in some cases, lack of interest
- 30 per cent have had to avoid specific places and change their usual routine and one in four has moved home as a result of the attack

Mike Holmes, convenor of the disability agenda Scotland policy group, which represents the major service providers in the third sector, says: "Considerable consultation has already taken place on this subject. We know disabled people expect the same protection as given by law to those affected by racially-aggravated offences and by religious hatred. There is every value in legislation encompassing hate crime in relation to race, religion, sexual orientation, disabled people and other cultural groups. It is now time to act. Doing nothing is not an option."

→ Have your say

- write to us 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk
- phone us 020 7619 7323



Despite widespread poverty, Kenyan society manages to find ways to support disabled people to live independently, says **Juliet Barnes**

Born and raised in sunny Kenya, I'd never heard of arthritis until I woke up one morning with painful, swollen hands. My feet felt as if somebody had stuffed them with pins. Even my hips were stiff...

I was just 17, stressing over A-levels!

Just over a decade later, I'd done marriage, had a son, then a daughter, and my husband had run off with his secretary! To add injury to insult, the tendons on my right hand had been rubbing relentlessly against the corroded wrist joint until they snapped.

Now I couldn't play the

piano, I was a single mum, and I needed to write to survive, but even typing was difficult. I eventually had an operation in Nairobi: my wrist was fused and wire inserted to operate the fingers.

I couldn't even do up a bra or butter a piece of toast. My kids Michael and Siana (*pictured above*) rose to the challenge, and my mother came to stay. But my increasingly difficult ex-husband had moved next door with his latest girlfriend. It was time to leave Nairobi.

I found my derelict dream house: mud-walled and tin-roofed, no electricity or

telephone or any other mod-cons, surrounded by buffalo-infested bush and no neighbours!

“In traditional Kenyan society they don't put their old or disabled people into homes”

In traditional Kenyan society, a person with any disability is cared for by family and community. They don't put their old or disabled people into homes. Kenyans go out of their way to assist somebody disadvantaged. They'll rush to open a door, or help you

upstairs on your crutches. I can't change a tyre on my Land Rover, but if my son, now 17, isn't there, somebody always materialises from beneath a thorn tree and does it for me.

The unemployment situation in Kenya means that even if you like housework and gardening there are so many people pleading for jobs, you end up hiring them because it's the only way they can educate their kids: too many women in rural Kenya are single mums.

A Maasai lady called Tuta came to work for us first. In return, I found a special school for her son, who has learning difficulties. When Tuta died of AIDS, she knew I'd continue his education.

I'd employed another single mum just before I'd fallen and fractured my hip. With the kids away at school, Alice had to do just about everything. She did – singing cheerfully, even waking up at night when needed. Family and friends visited, bringing supplies and taking the kids to school.

Kenyans respectfully call their elders Mzee. While doing historical research in a remote area further north, I met a man believed to be 112. This Mzee lived in a one-roomed hut, could barely walk, was blind, and the nearest water supply was a muddied river in a

distant valley. His son and great-grandchild helped him onto a sunny chair while his grand-daughter brewed tea. The contented Mzee told many extraordinary stories. He died the following year, surrounded by loving family.

My mother's Kimeru friend, Wambui, has severe arthritis in her back. After five children, Wambui finally left her violent husband. When I was a child, we often had Wambui's family to stay, and I would give them toys, books and clothes.

Wambui is no longer strong enough to work and can't afford medication. One of her daughters is employed and able to assist, my mother and I help where we can, but Wambui spends most of it on drugs for her daughter, who has epilepsy. Wambui lives for her grandchildren, who come home and beg her to tell traditional Kimeru tales, handed down through many generations.

I visited England last year: thankfully my teenagers could carry my bags and help with chores. Persistent rain seeped into my joints, and I was ready to return home. When we'd travelled the rough and dusty road to Alice's welcoming smile, I knew I was very blessed.

• Juliet Barnes, born and raised in Kenya, is a full-time writer and lives in a remote part of the Kenyan Rift Valley

Parking chief parks in disabled bay

Rome's parking boss was sacked after he was caught parking in an accessible bay while displaying a blue badge belonging to an 86-year-old woman.

Giovanni Catanzaro had apparently parked his red Alfa Romeo Brera near the Spanish Steps before going for lunch in a nearby restaurant.

Job rates slump for disabled Indians

Unemployment among disabled people in India is increasing, according to a new World Bank report.

The study, commissioned by the Indian government and based on a survey of 2,000 households, said the percentage of disabled people in work had fallen from 42.7 per cent in 1991 to 37.6 per cent in 2002.

Although the fall was partly because people with learning difficulties and mental health problems were not counted as disabled in the earlier study, the study still shows a fall to 39.6 per cent when these groups are excluded from the figures.

Between 1993 and 2000, the employment rate in the general population fell by only 1.1 percentage points.

The report concluded that further research was

needed to determine the explanation for the fall in the proportion of disabled people in work.

Call for disabled councillors

A politician in Botswana has called for ten per cent of seats on the capital's city council to be set aside for disabled people or relatives of disabled people.

Councillor Thuso

Ogotseng, speaking at an equality day in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, called for disabled people to be included in all sectors of society.

Bruce Sebolao, a wheelchair-user, called for improvements to education for disabled children, and better access to the city's shopping mall and public transport. He said he had never been able to travel on a bus or a train.



JOCK FISTICK

Braille is crime-fighting weapon

Belgian police have set up a new unit of six visually-impaired detectives as part of the fight against terrorism, drug-trafficking and organised crime.

Visually-impaired detectives (*like Sacha va Loo, pictured above*) listen to phone-tapping evidence

and bugged conversations.

The recruits, who work at the federal police headquarters in Antwerp, use braille keyboards and voice-activated software to transcribe every wiretap.

They have been granted police powers but are barred from making arrests or carrying guns.

There are plans to expand the unit.

onetowatch

Amar's passport to success

Amar Latif runs Traveleyes, a travel company which offers accessible holidays to disabled and other travellers. In November, he won the Stelios Disabled Entrepreneur Award, receiving a cheque for £50,000 from Sir Stelios Haji-loannou at the National Business Awards ceremony. In November 2005, he featured in the BBC2 reality show *Beyond Boundaries*.

What's the best thing about being disabled?

The stage it puts you on. And that you can actually make a difference. That's what excites me about being disabled.

What makes you angry?

Anger's not really good. Passion is essential. I don't get angry.

What's the funniest thing someone's ever said about your impairment?

A friend once warned me that reading a cheese grater can lead to serious injury.

How do you deal with people who barf on about your impairment? Have you any good put-downs?

I glaze over and say: "Oh, I'm sorry, were you talking about me being blind? I hadn't noticed."

What's the one thing that could be invented that would make your life as a disabled person better?

Eye transplants, and a face transplant if I turned out not to like how I looked.

What do you most like about your job?

Opening doors, opening horizons and opening up the world for people.

What do you not like?

There's nothing I don't like about my job. It's a passion.



In the pink: Sir Stelios Haji-loannou (*left*) with Amar Latif

Do you have any secret skills other than those related to your job?

I play and sing the blues. I toured America and Canada singing the low-down Glasgow Asian Blues. I've also done a bit of acting. In the New Year I can be seen as a busker in a television play starring Tamsin Greig.

If you didn't have your impairment, which one would you like to have?

What impairment?

→ Who do you think is One to Watch?

Send us your nominations for likely lads and lasses who could answer our 10 questions. They can be rising stars in any field of entertainment, business, the media or beyond

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- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk
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Five months ago, *Disability Now* published an in-depth investigation into the murders of Steven Hoskin, Barrie-John Horrell and Rikki Judkins, the manslaughter of Raymond Atherton and the torture and death of Kevin Davies. In this edition, we publish a damning analysis of 50 cases nationwide – and details of our new hate crime campaign. **Katharine Quarmby** reports

No hiding place



From left to right: Rikki Judkins; Fiona Pilkington; Raymond Atherton; Kevin Davies; Frankie Hardwick; Steven Hoskin

Our September investigation found that none of these five crimes were identified as potential disability hate crimes.

The men all had money stolen; four were attacked by so-called "friends", they were dehumanised and subjected to overwhelming violence. Since then other cases have come to light.

Hartlepool resident Christine Lakinski collapsed near her front door in July this year. A crowd gathered. Anthony Anderson urinated on her as she lay dying. He was convicted of outraging public decency – prosecutors told *Disability Now* that there was "no evidence" that he targeted Miss Lakinski because of her disability, despite the fact that they were neighbours and she had a visible impairment. In another recent case, a West Midlands resident, Fiona

Pilkington, killed herself and her disabled daughter, Frankie, after months of abuse by young people. Police confirm that Ms Pilkington had complained about harassment, which they logged as anti-social behaviour, not as on-going hate crime.

“The CPS needs to be more aggressive in examining the background of victims to see if there is any evidence of underlying hostility”

The police failed to flag this harassment as potential hate crimes. Prosecutors failed to ask police to gather evidence on whether they were hate crimes. Judges were unable to pass stiffer sentences as a result (or to

take it into account as an aggravating factor when determining the life tariff in the case of murder).

There has been some progress. In November, Sir Ken Macdonald, the director of public prosecutions, acknowledged at a parliamentary meeting of the charity Voice UK, that when he had read about the case of Kevin Davies, he felt there may have been an underlying hostility. He added that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), needs to be more "proactive and aggressive" in examining the background of victims to see if there is any evidence of underlying hostility based on their impairment. Assistant chief constable Drew Harris, who leads on hate crime for the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), said at the same meeting that "his blood still ran cold" when he read about the



recent murders of disabled people.

This month, we looked at 50 cases of crime against disabled people nationwide. These cases represent just the tip of the iceberg of the violence experienced by disabled people – as previous surveys reveal. One such, by the charity Nacro, in 2002, found that disabled people are four times more likely to be violently assaulted than non-disabled people and almost twice as likely to be burgled. A 2004 survey by the Disability Rights Commission and Capability Scotland found that 47 per cent of respondents had been attacked or frightened because of their impairment. One in five had suffered an attack at least once a week. Those with learning difficulties were most likely to be targeted. Of those who were attacked, 35 per cent were physically assaulted, 15 per cent were spat at and 18 per cent had something stolen. A report (*see box, page 21, for more details*) by the mental health charity Mind, published in November, found that people with mental health problems are around six times more likely to be assaulted than those in the general population. Nearly two-thirds of those polled were dissatisfied with the official response when they reported the incident.

Our cases reinforce those findings and show us striking patterns of criminality. Some disabled people are preyed upon by “friends”, robbed,

and attacked. Some end up dead as a result. Others are targeted by youths who mock and often assault them. In a significant number of cases, disabled people were falsely called paedophiles – and then subjected to the law of the lynch mob. Many disabled people subjected to robbery were also humiliated – by being taunted, spat at or tipped out of their wheelchairs. We also identified another disturbing trend – of repeated vandalism of places used by disabled people (*see box, page 23*).

Disabled people are being attacked for the ‘crime’ of living independent lives

Our investigation shows that police are not taking disability hate crime seriously enough and that disabled people are being attacked for the “crime” of living independent lives. Some crimes we looked at were opportunistic. But the number of times where gratuitous violence was used suggests that disabled people are being targeted by criminals, some of whom are clearly hostile to them because of their impairment.

The cases encompass the full panoply of human nastiness. One young man with learning difficulties was viciously attacked in Blackwood, Gwent, when he went to buy a newspaper. In Princes Risborough, a blind man was spat at and verbally abused. In Birmingham, a wheelchair-user, Jonathan Lea, was battered with a pole by a motorist. Four disabled men suffered arson attacks. And 17 wheelchair or mobility scooter-users were not only robbed but tipped or dragged out of their vehicles.

Some attacks resulted in death or serious injury. Doncaster resident



The shed where Kevin Davies died



The viaduct from which Steven Hoskin was pushed

Robert Griffiths died in an arson attack. Christopher Foulkes, of Rhyl, Wales, was viciously attacked by a teenager (who cannot be named), who had been regularly visiting him and stealing his money. Mr Foulkes died. The teenager was originally charged with murder, but the charge was dropped, and the youth pleaded guilty to wounding with intent. In October 2006, a wheelchair-user, Craig Robins, was brain-injured in an attack after he confronted people he thought were responsible for repeated vandalism to his adapted car. In Sheffield, in April 2007, a blind father, Colin Greenwood, was kicked to death by two teenagers. According to a woman who came to his aid, Mr Greenwood had stopped using a white stick for fear of being targeted.

Just three of the cases that we reviewed were treated as disability hate crimes. Lancashire police did not treat an arson attack on the home of a Blackpool resident, who says he had suffered attacks before at home, as a hate crime. (However, the same force is treating the robbery and assault on a young man with cerebral palsy, in Accrington, as a hate crime.) South Yorkshire police acknowledge that there had been two other incidents at the flats where Mr Griffiths lived (which were then burnt down) but maintain there is “no evidence that he was being targeted”. The case of the young man who was robbed and threatened with being killed while buying a newspaper

was not treated, Gwent police said, as a hate crime. "There was no evidence to suggest this was the motive for the alleged offence," said a spokeswoman, although at the time police said that they believed the assault was prompted by the young man's impairment. In the South Wales police force area, four disabled people were attacked and three robbed over a six-month period. One was jeered at by his attackers and

had an epileptic seizure. Another was forced into an alleyway, robbed and called a paedophile. South Wales police failed to treat any of these as disability hate crimes. A spokesperson said: "I think officers will have been unaware of the category at that time and probably will have just dealt with it as [just] a crime." The force is due to receive training this month on investigating disability hate crime. A good thing, too

— a number of police spokespeople were distinctly hazy about what constituted a disability hate crime.

We also asked the CPS to explain why so few of our cases were treated as hate crimes. Seamus Taylor, director of equality and diversity, said: "Turning our policy on disability hate crime into consistent practice on the ground has highlighted some challenges." Of the ten cases that we ➔

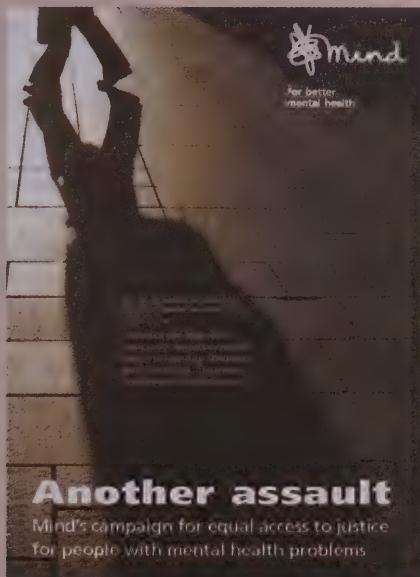
Victim twice over

Elizabeth Choppin

People with mental health issues are eleven times more likely to be victimised than the rest of society, according to "shocking" new statistics. *Another Assault**, a report published last month by mental health charity Mind, showed that 71 per cent of survey respondents with mental distress have been victimised in the last two years.

The report revealed that 90 per cent of respondents who lived in local authority housing had been victimised, while 22 per cent had been physically assaulted. Findings also showed that 27 per cent of respondents had been sexually harassed and 41 per cent were the victims of ongoing bullying. A large proportion (64 per cent) of respondents said they were dissatisfied with the response of the authorities when they reported the incident.

Londoner Nicola Barnaby*, 67, who has chronic anxiety, told *Disability Now* that she had endured seven years of physical and verbal abuse from tenants



in her council flat.

Ms Barnaby said she felt sickened by how the police responded to her initial complaint of being pushed and called a "mad schizo".

She said: "It could have been nipped in the bud but the police bungled it. I think I'm being targeted because I'm vulnerable and they (the perpetrators) are just bullies. Once you get a label, it is very difficult to change people's perception of you."

She added: "Neither the council or the police seem willing to put any effort into stopping it."

Anna Bird, policy officer at Mind, said that the charity was "shocked" at the report's findings: "Not just by the figures, which are definitely shocking, but by the testimony of experiences. It was often ongoing and never resorted in any justice being done." She added that the report showed that victims of abuse were frustrated and had an expectation that nothing will be done to stop the crimes against them.

A spokeswoman from the Equality and Human Rights Commission said: "This is yet another report revealing the disproportionate level of violence visited upon disabled people in this country...The EHRC takes this issue extremely seriously and will be setting out its own actions in the new year."

A Home Office spokeswoman said: "We take the issues raised in this report seriously and are committed to tackling the disproportionate levels of victimisation suffered by people experiencing mental health distress highlighted in the report."

- For a copy of the report, tel: 0845 766 0163 or visit www.mind.org.uk

*Name has been changed

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asked CPS to look at in detail, none were treated as aggravated offences. In the case of Craig Robins, who was set upon by four people he thought were responsible for damage to his adapted car, the reviewing lawyer said: "There is no evidence that they even knew he was disabled, let alone were motivated by it" – despite the fact that Mr Robins was paralysed from the waist down and a wheelchair-user.

We also asked ACC Harris, ACPO lead on hate crimes, to comment on our findings. He said that he had created a team "to look at ways of ensuring hate

crime policy is understood and applied consistently across Great Britain and Northern Ireland".

Andrew Lee, director of the charity People First (Self Advocacy), said: "We are not surprised by what *Disability Now* has found," and added that at the moment he felt that "people with learning difficulties have no access to justice".

Julie Newman, chair of the UK Disabled People's Council, said: "I welcome the work that is being done to expose the shame of disability hate crime. Such work is long overdue. It is

unacceptable that there has been such a reluctance on the part of the police and legal services to recognise such crime and to take active measures to prevent it. As disabled people, we are all able to recount instances of hate crime... it must be the greatest unreported crime in this country."

Neil Crowther, director of disability programmes at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), said: "*Disability Now*'s investigation reveals the disturbing extent of attacks, abuse, intimidation and harassment facing particular disabled →

Vandals target disabled people's homes and property

Elizabeth Choppin

Ongoing vandalism and abuse of disabled people and their property has been taking place across the UK and police are failing to investigate them as hate crimes.

In October, the Thistle Foundation in Scotland, which is home to more than 100 disabled residents, experienced repeated problems with stones being thrown through windows.

Sally Cameron, the marketing director, said that the attacks were "scary" for the residents (although she did not know whether they were aimed specifically at disabled people). She said that the police were not treating them as targeted attacks.

In a similar situation, a residential home for disabled people in Towcester has been repeatedly vandalised "for years and years", with the latest incident in November, but both the manager and Northamptonshire police insist it is not specifically directed at disabled residents.

There were numerous attacks

during the summer on a disabled horse-riding school, the North Warwickshire Equestrian Centre. Helen Holley, whose sister used to ride there, raised funds for repairs.

She said: "It's one of the very few purpose-built facilities for disabled people in the area. The vandalism has had an impact on the cash flow of the charity."

Police are failing to investigate...vandalism and abuse of the property of disabled people...as hate crimes

In another incident, a woman with Down's syndrome was seriously injured in early November after a brick was thrown through the window of her care home in Warrington. According to reports, the home, which houses people with learning difficulties, has been repeatedly targeted, yet local police have ruled that it would not be treated as a hate crime.

In November, a minibus carrying disabled students from Bridge College in Offerton had a stone hurled through the back window while on the motorway.

Head teacher Maggie Thompson said: "I think that anyone who deliberately or without thought acts in the fashion the culprits did is compounding the act of callous stupidity by involving vehicles that are or may be carrying particularly vulnerable people."

Earlier this year, a family in south Wales contacted police because their car was repeatedly vandalised after they were granted a disabled parking bay. South Wales police have refused to disclose whether the case was pursued as a disability hate crime. *Disability Now* is aware of a number of similar incidents.

David Congdon, director of policy for Mencap, said that police ought automatically to start an investigation of a crime involving a disabled person with a view to whether it could be disability-targeted.

people in our communities today and the poor response on the ground of our criminal justice system." He added: "The EHRC supports *Disability Now's* campaign and we will be working with disability organisations and others to identify how best we can contribute to eliminating hate crime."

Liz Sayce, chief executive of the charity RADAR, said: "Until *Disability Now* investigated, there were precious

few facts and figures available to spearhead the campaign for action that we need." She called for "the police to reach out to disabled people to build our confidence in reporting hate crimes. It is crucial that the police and CPS believe disabled people who report crimes and give every support at each stage of the process."

The scale of disability hate crime has

never before been seen or analysed in this way. It was hidden from view, each case viewed on its own as a random, motiveless attack. Now it is hidden no longer. The patterns are clear.

Ignorance is no longer an excuse.

So it's time for change. Join our campaign (*more details below*) and get involved. And visit our website at www.disabilitynow.org.uk for more information on the 50 cases. ■

Hate Crime Campaign: 10 questions for you to answer

The *Disability Now* campaign for hate crime against disabled people to be recognised for what it is starts right here. And we need you to be involved.

The criminal justice system has failed disabled people for far too long. They are being mocked, attacked, tortured, robbed and murdered and the criminal justice system is not responding appropriately. We're campaigning for that to change and we will come back to you in the New Year with exciting new developments as we team up with other organisations to challenge disability hate crime. While we will continue to raise awareness of the scale of the problem, we will also campaign for changes to the way in which the

criminal justice system responds to disabled crime victims. These are our four main aims:

- * We want the police to ask each disabled victim of crime whether they perceive that they were targeted because they were disabled
- * We want prosecutors to ask police "Was this a hate crime?" before drawing up the charge sheet
- * We want judges to refer to the fact that a crime was aggravated by hostility in their summing up and the aggravation to be reflected in the sentence
- * We want to increase the reporting of hate crimes.

We've teamed up with Victim Support, a national charity that helps

victims cope with the effects of crime. The charity wants to help all disabled victims of crime, whether or not they want to report their experiences to the police. They can be contacted at www.victimsupport.org.uk or by phone on 0845 30 30 900. If you have hearing difficulties, please call using the TextDirect access number: 18001 0845 30 30 90, or you can call the minicom (or text telephone) number on 020 7896 3776.

We're also asking you to contact us with more of your experiences at editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

Please try and answer as many of the questions below so we can build up a better picture of disability hate crime around the country.

- 1. What happened and where did it take place?**
- 2. Has it happened more than once?**
- 3. Did you report it?**
- 4. If so, who to? What happened as a result? How did they respond? What was the outcome?**
- 5. If not, why not?**

- 6. Do you feel safe?**
- 7. Do you feel safe within your own home?**
- 8. What would make you feel safer?**
- 9. Any other comments**
- 10. Would you be willing to talk to the press about your experiences and comment on other cases in your local area?**

With grateful thanks to Coventry City Council, which carried out an excellent survey on hate crime



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Francesca Martinez has been called a drunk and a fake. As she kicks off a tour of her latest stand-up show, she tells **Ian Macrae** that her comedy's the real deal

No drink, no drugs, just laughs

Everything about Francesca Martinez's comedy is rooted in the reality of who she is. Her comic timing doesn't just rely on the naturally slow rhythms of her speech, it derives from them. Her on-stage persona is an extension of her disabled self. And her material comes directly from her life and experience in ways which few comedians since Billy Connolly would ever dream of showing. But it wasn't always like that.

"I felt ashamed of myself and my disability," she says. "I really had the attitude that if I didn't mention it, people wouldn't see it, which was totally stupid."

There's irony, then, in the fact that salvation from her self-doubt came from an unlikely source. Hearing former England football manager Glenn Hoddle say that maybe we, as disabled people, had all done something wrong in a previous life set her thinking about just what that could have been. Her first routine was born.

On the surface, though, she'd always appeared out and proud about being disabled. She came to public attention playing a character with her own impairment – how could she be

anything else? – in the BBC's legendary children's show *Grange Hill*. And she loved it.

"I had an idyllic time there. I spent my youth wanting to act on television, so the job was a dream come true and I was very happy there, unlike in my real school life. So it did very much make me confident."

I'd never been nervous, but there was something about stand-up, something so raw and honest and vulnerable, that really scared me

But, like many kids leaving the relative safety of the classroom – all be it a fictional one – that confidence was quickly undermined as reality and people's expectations kicked in.

"I was never put up for roles unless it had in big letters THIS CHARACTER HAS CEREBRAL PALSY! I could never just go up for a female role because people wouldn't even consider casting me. They'd express interest, then my agent would say: 'Francesca has mild CP,' and they'd be like,

'Oh, right, we'll get back to you.'"

At this point, enter her father, screenwriter Alex Martinez, waving a film script which he'd written especially for her. He'd placed Francesca as the central character, who happened to be a stand-up comedian.

"When a production company took a real interest in doing it, I thought I'd better do some research."

But here was a whole new scene, and it was very scary.

"I'd never been nervous, but there was something about stand-up, something so raw and honest and vulnerable, that really scared me," she says.

After Hoddle was sacked as England manager for his comments, she continued to rely on real people and their reactions to her for her funniest material. And this has proved to be a gold-mine.

"Anyone with a physical difference has loads of stories to tell. My main one is that people think I'm drunk. I used to go out clubbing and boys would chat me up and they'd go, 'God. You've had a lot, haven't you?' And I'd say, 'I don't drink.' And they'd say, 'What you on then?' and I'd say, 'I'm not on anything.' What fascinates me



CHRISTINA MARTINEZ

is the power of people's pre-conceptions. They have a very specific idea of what disability is. And it's kind of like, if you don't fit that stereotype you must be pissed."

I wondered about her own comedy heroes. Unsurprisingly, she goes for someone whose style is whacky, observational and decidedly not right-on.

"I'd have to say Bill Hicks. He wanted to make people laugh, but above all he wanted to make them question their assumptions. There are a few topics on which I don't agree with him, like drugs; he seems very enamoured of drugs, I'm not at all. So I'm not saying I agree with all his views, but as a comedian who goes out there and tries to express himself honestly and challenge the status quo, I find that inspiring."

Somewhere at the other end of the comedy rainbow, Jim Davidson also happens to be on tour. He freely admits that, unlike Martinez, he relies heavily on alcohol – maybe it's some sort of crutch for him. He also recently courted controversy, again, by saying that people with learning difficulties – "mentally handicapped people" as he insists on putting it – "howl like animals". As something of a natural libertarian, Francesca is not as forthrightly dismissive as you might expect. But she does go back to the school yard for her criticism.

"I've always said that nothing should be off limits, but it's what they are saying. If they're challenging the audience, then go for it. But if it's playground humour, that's cruel and frankly lazy. If you're a comedian and you're paid money to do shows, come

up with something interesting, please!"

So given the directness of her own disabled comedy voice, there must be people in the audience sometimes who just don't get it.

"One of my very early reviews said, 'She's very good...blah blah blah...but some of the jokes could have come out of the mouth of Bernard Manning.' And I thought, you really didn't get it! Bernard Manning had a completely different agenda. It's right-on reviewers usually who say, 'it's very funny, but is it PC to laugh at it?' She believes that, as disabled people, we have more of a sense of humour because there's plenty for us to laugh about. ■

Francesca's In Deep tour dates

12 January 2008
The Gala Theatre, Durham
0191 332 4041
www.galadurham.co.uk

18 January 2008
The Tivoli Theatre, Wimborne
01202 885566
www.tivoliwimborne.co.uk
6-9, 13-16, 20 -23 February
Hackney Empire London
020 8985 2424
www.hackneyempire.co.uk

1 March 2008
The Millfield Theatre, Enfield
020 8807 6680
www.millfieldtheatre.co.uk

6 March 2008
The Epsom Playhouse
01372 742555
www.epsomplayhouse.co.uk

9 March 2008
Komedia, Brighton
01273 647100
www.komedia.co.uk/brighton

12 April 2008
The Cambridge Junction
01223 511511



Religion: the final frontier

Do the major religions support disabled people on the path to independence or do they create barriers of their own? **Sunil Peck** investigates

I have been a guide dog owner for almost 10 years now, so I am used to being turned away by Muslim restaurateurs and taxi-drivers.

I have lost count of the times that minicabs have said they can't take me in their cars because of my dog, and I eventually stopped going to Bangladeshi restaurants without checking in advance, because they kept turning me away.

There have been well-publicised cases of discrimination as well. In 2006, a taxi-driver pleaded guilty to a charge under the Disability Discrimination Act after refusing to allow a guide dog in his car because he claimed it would breach Islamic law.

After the case, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) said the driver had been ill-informed. Although dog saliva is considered unclean and impure, there are circumstances where allowances can be made.

If somebody is blind or not able to walk, then a son or someone will help

But is this the only example of a conflict between the culture of a particular religious group and the independence of disabled people? Or are there customs or beliefs within Islam, and other major religions such as Judaism and Christianity, which

negatively affect disabled people's lives?

Sadaqat Ali, a deaf Muslim, was unable to "fit into the Muslim community" when he grew up in Derby. His family were supportive while he was growing up, but he was perceived as being "different" by the rest of the community because of his hearing impairment. He says some Muslims believe that being disabled is synonymous with "shame".

But Irshad Baquie, executive director of the Islamic Foundation, says that if a person cannot walk, see or hear, God will compensate by giving them greater intuition or the ability to think more deeply than a non-disabled person.

"In Islam, a sickness or handicap is



NORWOOD

Food for thought: Norwood service-users enjoy a traditional Sabbath meal

Shindlers are forbidden to carry out certain activities outside their homes during the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest. For instance, they cannot push a wheelchair.

To avoid violating the law during the Sabbath when his son was younger, Rabbi Dr Shindler relied on one of his daughter's non-Jewish friends to push the wheelchair to the synagogue and back while he walked alongside.

They achieve their spiritual potential in other ways; maybe they have got it already

It is also forbidden to switch electrical devices on or off during the Sabbath, so observers who use powerchairs or hearing-aids must also rely on non-observers to give them a hand, or, in the case of hearing-aids, leave them switched on.

But what about the big religious charities and their emphasis on the provision of institutional care and their use of segregated settings?

Norwood is "the UK's largest Jewish charity supporting children and families with learning disabilities or coping with social difficulties". It runs a residential community, Ravenswood, for adults with learning difficulties.

A spokesman from the charity says: "The various models of residential living that we provide are not based on

Jewish teachings per se, but rather on what is best for the individual. Regardless of where they live, we give residents the opportunity to express their religious observance and culture in whichever way they choose."

Jacky Oliver, chief executive of Through the Roof, a Christian charity promoting access and inclusion in Church life, says Jesus himself "revolutionised the approach to disabled people", by talking to them rather than shunning them for their perceived sins. But over the centuries, she says, history has resulted in Christianity moving towards a medical model approach, "trying to be very caring, but in fact in a condescending way".

Oliver cites examples of Church staff who do not regard steps as a problem because they are happy to carry wheelchair-users up them.

She is also aware of a vicar who objected to a disabled person performing a bible reading during a service because their "deformity" might upset other worshippers.

The Rev John Naude, vicar at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Hampshire and another member of Through the Roof, is one of a few full-time wheelchair-using English clergy within the Church of England.

"Historically," he says, "the Church has primarily seen disabled people as people who you do things for, in the sense of the old charity image. I think through

regarded as a test," he says, "and the patience of those who were tested will not be wasted with Allah, who has prepared for the one who had patience innumerable rewards."

Ali is now a youth worker with a deaf Muslim group, and says attitudes are improving. But he was only able to develop a Muslim identity and participate in the community after he learned British Sign Language. He says some deaf Muslims are so cut off from Islamic culture that they will eat pork, unaware that their religion forbids it.

Islam teaches that Muslims should show compassion and look after members of the community who are ill or disabled. So, according to Irshad Ali, a partially-sighted Imam from Bedford: "If somebody is blind or not able to walk, then a son or someone will help."

So what about other mainstream religions?

Rabbi Dr Julian Shindler, Rabbinic liaison in the Office of the Chief Rabbi, says that, although Jewish people must observe obligations to show their devotion, such as praying, their "intrinsic value" as a human being is not diminished if an impairment prevents them observing every ritual.

"If you have somebody who, through no fault of their own, is born with severe learning difficulties and simply has not got a clue what day of the week it is or is unable to pick up a book and pray, then that person is exempt from that obligation," he says. "They achieve their spiritual potential in other ways; maybe they have got it already."

But there are aspects of Judaism that do make it harder for disabled people to achieve independence and observe their religious obligations.

Rabbi Dr Shindler's son has cerebral palsy and is a wheelchair-user. Now 20, he attended a mainstream school.

As strict religious observers, the

disabled people and the disability movement, disabled people are saying, 'I don't want to be pew-fodder any more. I have a part to play within the Church."

He says the Church's attitude to disabled people in the 1980s was "awful", but he pursued a life in the Church because it was "a calling from God".

The Disability Discrimination Act has helped to change attitudes, he says. "I have noticed a huge amount of change in the 10 years that I have been ordained.

"People are less inclined to be working on the medical model of disability and are moving much more towards the social model."

The idea of prayer and pilgrimage to "relieve pain and suffering" has traditionally been an important part of the Catholic faith. The water from the spring of the grotto at Lourdes is said to

I don't want to be pew-fodder any more. I have a part to play within the Church

have "healing and cleansing properties". And after Holy Masses and his Wednesday Audiences in Rome, sick and disabled people have a spot reserved for them that allows them to be closer to



Raising the roof: the Rev John Naude



JON SANTA CRUZ/REX FEATURES

Lourdes prayer: pilgrims attend Mass at the Basilica of the Rosary, Lourdes, France

the Pope, and he stops to greet them.

The modern Catholic Church still sees disabled people as different, "suffering" and "special" and in need of cures and charity.

Dr Lina Petri, press secretary to the Vatican, says: "Suffering has always had a special place in the attentions of the charity of the Church. Therefore, obviously, both the sick and the disabled who have less apparent possibilities than so-called normal people, they are always in the centre of the attentions of the Church, the Popes, and of course the various institutions run by them."

Cristina Gangemi, disability adviser to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark, and to the wider Church in the UK, says: "The whole idea of Lourdes is that there is a sense of healing within it. What we have been trying to do is create a shift in culture whereby we do not see it as healing the body, but that a disabled person can experience inner healing; nothing to do with being cured of a disability."

"There is no doctrine in the Catholic Church that compels disabled people to go on pilgrimages. Pilgrimages are not just for disabled people. Pilgrimages are something that are part and parcel of Catholic life."

"Lourdes is a place for all Catholics, lots of people go to Lourdes. But they go for inner healing."

But John McCorkell, a disabled

Catholic who is involved in a project to promote greater inclusion in the Church, says he has not encountered any issues arising from his impairment that have infringed his independence.

"In my experience as a disabled Catholic, I have not had any negative perceptions sent in my direction. I am physically disabled, though very independent, and I don't allow this to stop me from doing many things. I received the sacrament of Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation at the same age as someone who does not have a disability."

Ms Gangemi insists that the atmosphere within the Catholic Church in this country is changing. "The medical model prevailed in the church up until eight years ago, and a disabled person would have been linked to suffering," she says. "We [the disability advisers for England and Wales] have managed to get right to the centre of the hierarchy, so much so that the bishops' conference (the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales) produced a website that spoke of equality and the fact that a disabled person has something to teach the whole Church."

"The Disability Discrimination Act has been my best friend in the work that I have been doing. We have got a long way to go but I would say that within the Catholic Church in England and Wales, the medical model is becoming a thing of the past." ■



Is your vehicle?

The Low Emission Zone (LEZ) is being introduced from 4 February 2008 to help improve air quality in Greater London. There will be a phased launch, starting with the heaviest of the most polluting diesel-engined lorries (over 12 tonnes) which will need to meet Euro III emissions standards for particulate matter (PM). Lighter lorries between 3.5 and 12 tonnes will need to meet this standard from 7 July 2008 and larger vans between 1.205 tonnes (unladen weight) and 3.5 tonnes must meet this standard from 4 October 2010. All lorries over 3.5 tonnes must meet Euro IV for PM by January 2012.

You will need to check that your vehicle meets the specified emissions standards to drive within the Greater London Low Emission Zone without paying the high daily charge. Owners of GB-licensed vehicles can use the vehicle compliance checker at tfl.gov.uk/lezlondon or call 0845 607 0009 to see if they are affected and what action they may have to take.

Some vehicles with Euro II engines and a very small number of vehicles with Euro I engines may also meet the required LEZ emissions standards. The list of eligible engines is available on our website or call us for information and next steps.

If your vehicle doesn't meet the LEZ emissions standards, there are several options:

- Avoid travelling in the zone.

- Modify your vehicle by fitting approved pollution abatement equipment.

- Upgrade to a newer vehicle.

- Pay the daily charge of £200 (vehicles over 3.5 tonnes, affected from 2008) or £100 (vehicles under 3.5 tonnes, affected from October 2010).

All non-GB licensed vehicles (inc. Northern Ireland) which meet the emissions standards need to be registered for the LEZ with Transport for London to be driven within the zone without incurring high daily charges. Registration forms are available online or call (+44) 20 7310 8998 from overseas.

Visit tfl.gov.uk/lezlondon or call 0845 607 0009 for more information.



Poppy poster: positive or patronising?

In response to the editorial by Ian Macrae (*Disability Now December, Editorial*): having been injured in the 1991 Gulf War, my opinions on issues of disability are constructed from both an abled and disabled person's point of view, as well as that of a parent and married person. I was immensely proud to have been asked to be in this year's Poppy Appeal poster campaign and I truly believe the finished poster image (*above right*) is not only very powerful but sensitively achieves the aim of raising awareness of the 900,000 injured servicemen and women in the country today. Having personally benefited from the Royal British Legion's help and support on more than one occasion, I do not feel that the image of the poppy man enabling me is in any way undermining or setting back equal rights, equal choices and equal lives of disabled people.

The national and regional newspapers this year have united to show respect and support for



the service community, the injured and the families of the bereaved. Their response to the poster campaign has been 100 per cent positive and all the editorial supportive... bar one.

Sadly, *Disability Now*, you stand alone – a remnant of the sad times of wheelchair-users chaining themselves to buses to make a point, alienating themselves and not integrating themselves into an inclusive society.

No-one else would have the gall to make such a comment on anything related to Remembrance Sunday in this manner. It's not morally right to do so, even if it is related to disability. Some things should and must remain sacred, and the act of remembrance is one of those things.

**Allen Parton,
by email**

The latest poster campaign by the Poppy Appeal uses a striking image but it reinforces the stereotype of helpless, pitiful disabled people, surviving through charity and the good heart of the general public. While disabled people do have needs, this is not equal to lack of independence.

Why is it the case that many soldiers who are injured, after serving their country, are left dependent on charity for their wellbeing? It is objectionable that to "appeal" to public generosity, disabled people are once again portrayed as pitiful. Why not make a different appeal and show how donations will be used towards empowering and enabling disabled soldiers? Why not show that a relatively small donation can go a long way, by way of technical equipment, training and even the provision of disability equality training to their employers? An enabling attitude that is free of prejudice and assumptions; that is the greatest donation we can make to ourselves and disabled people.

**Maria G Zedda, director,
Wideaware Training Ltd**

Don't be so negative about autism

I picked up a copy of *Disability Now* this morning and found it a very interesting read. However, I was disappointed to read the following in the piece on "awareness days" (*Disability Now November, Guest Column*):

"'Understanding' autism may be impossible, but greater awareness of its impact on people with the condition might make others behave differently towards them and bullying less socially acceptable."

As someone on the autistic spectrum, I would like to gently suggest that you consider avoiding referring to autism as a "condition", which implies an illness or disease. Autism is neither of these things, nor is it a disorder, or any of the other negative terms often used to describe it.

Autism is essentially an unusual neurological configuration; it does not have inherent health consequences, and indeed there are very few aspects of an autistic's differences from "normal" people (whatever those are!) which are inherently disabling.

Autism could indeed be said to be a perfect example of disability being an avoidable social construct. If I lived in a world where

the majority were autistic, I doubt it would matter that I find it hard to learn implicit, unspoken rules, because I don't think there would be many of them!

The impression that I got from the magazine is that you are committed to using sensitive language, so I hope you will understand why I am drawing this to your attention.

Anwen Grant, by email

Give disabled people time for consultation

If Anne McGuire (minister for disabled people) wants to see "real and lasting change" and wants to listen to disabled people, perhaps the first thing she should be working on is the Cabinet Office and their recommended length of time for consultations. A reasonable consultation period, for any group or organisation that wants to meaningfully involve and consult with disabled people is six months. Many user-led organisations of disabled people can only afford to produce quarterly magazines or newsletters. Three months just isn't long enough. Also, many forums that disabled people attend only happen quarterly or less.

Time and time again, when I highlight that three months is not long enough,

the same excuse is thrown back: "We meet the Cabinet Office recommendation of three months," and they refuse to allow longer. It's high time the Cabinet Office made some "reasonable adjustments" to enable us to be more fully involved!

Sally Dixon, by email

Pavement plea to town of Caerphilly

Is it a lot to ask for my wife and myself to use our pavements? I use a battery-powered wheelchair, my wife a scooter. For us to get to our local town of Caerphilly, we have to stay on the road. Our pavements either have brambles, weeds, trees, or signs up or on the floor, making it impossible to use the pavements. Or you get cars parked on the drop kerbs.

Mr & Mrs S Lewis, by email

Am I part of an invisible population?

I was born with cerebral palsy 42 years ago and it has pleased me greatly to see the positive change in attitude that has taken place regarding disability



JAMIE TROUNCE

Ramp it up: why don't wheelchair-users go out more?

in this society of ours.

People are definitely more educated these days, and I write as someone who experienced years and years of ridicule when growing up.

Vast improvements have also been made in terms of access to public buildings. But why don't more disabled people go out socially?

I rarely see anyone with a disability using all these wonderful, wheelchair-friendly facilities we now have at our disposal.

At times, I feel like I'm part of an invisible population. Is it the cost of going out that's prohibitive?

Rick Bowen, Altrincham,

→ Have your say

- write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk
- visit our forum <http://disabilitynow.infopop.cc/eve/ubb.x>

Demand larger signs and bigger print

I would like the authorities to ensure public signs are more visible for people with eyesight disabilities. So often the size of print on signs in stations and even in hospitals showing the way to other wards is small and pale.

The signs in supermarkets are often quite small and telephone directories no longer have the area name in large print on the spine of the phone book. It can be difficult to read articles in magazines when words are printed over the top of strongly-coloured artwork! We need to press for larger signs and clearer print on everything.

A Wills, Middlesex

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2004 53 Trafic, 1 owner, 18,000 miles, A/C, red	£10,995	2001 Y Mercedes V220 CDi, Front passenger	£TE
2003 53 VW Transporter 2.5 TDi, 33,000 miles, A/C	£9,650	2001 Y Voyager TD Chairman, A/C etc	£13,75
2003 53 Mercedes Vaneo Jubilee, Automatic	£14,995	2000 W Kangoo Automatic Chairman	£6,99
2003 03 Brotherwood Sharon 2.0, 9,000 miles	£P.O.A.	1998 R VW LWB, 56,000 miles, lift fitted	£6,25
2003 03 Brotherwood Berlingo 1.6, Full spec, 23,000 miles	£11,750	1997 R Vanette Cargo Brotherwood, low floor	£5,99

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andyrickell



Wrong messages

Why does the media have to twist and distort disability stories, asks **Andy Rickell**

Last month I talked about the NHS's role in influencing disablism attitudes – attitudes which treat disabled people as second-class citizens, or not fully human. This time, let's look at the media.

Outside our immediate families, politicians may have most power over our lives, but the media has collectively the most power to influence what we think and the attitudes we hold.

The issue for disabled people is how the media exercises this power in respect of attitudes to impairment, disability, ourselves and our rights.

The media seems to work in four ways which impact on society's attitudes towards disability:

- 1 How the media reflects and reports attitudes that society already holds;
- 2 How it sensationalises and distorts disability issues to make news stories or programmes;
- 3 Whether disabled people have high-profile and influential roles in the media – for example, actors, broadcasters, journalists; and
- 4 How it tries to influence

public opinion through advertising, comment and campaigning.

The first of these implies that actually all the media is doing is reflecting the disablism attitudes that society already holds, so the media might argue it is not

The media is not obliged to hold up a mirror to society without comment

to blame. However, the media is not obliged to hold up a mirror to society without comment. Also, sometimes the media has a commercial interest in reflecting what society wants to hear – it may have a vested interest. But the result of portraying disablism attitudes through the powerful lens of media channels is that disablism is not just reflected but magnified and worsened.

The second point is where the media has most power – how it tells disability stories. To make such stories appealing, there is a tendency negatively to overemphasise impairment and its practical and

emotional impact, and positively to overemphasise "struggling against adversity" and the importance of others in the disabled person's life. The media have disability firmly in the "tragic but brave" and "impairment is a burden" boxes.

Disability is indeed an important story – it is a key aspect of society's communal life – but if instead it was put in the context of disabled people's struggle against disablism, such stories would work to combat disablism rather than stoke it up.

The third point affects attitudes in two ways. Firstly, if more disabled people have senior positions within media organisations, they can positively influence the portrayal of disability and the attitudes it engenders. Secondly, if more disabled people have publicly high-profile and influential media

roles than the currently low representation, this will have a direct positive impact on attitudes towards disabled people as leaders in society.

Finally, my fourth point. The media clearly uses its power deliberately to influence public opinion: But even in commercial advertising there are opportunities to get society thinking in new social terms while selling products, let alone in more considered public comment.

Disabled people need powerful allies in the media willing to comment and campaign positively for disabled people's rights and an end to disablism.

We need high-profile mainstream media outlets – newspapers, radio or TV channels – prepared to pick up the mighty pen in the name of justice and freedom for disabled Britons.

• **Andy Rickell is an executive director at Scope**

→ Have your say

- write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

ask the experts

you ask, they answer



Experts: Simon Parritt, Kate Sheehan, John Mandrak, Linda Clarke, Andy Wright, Ed Passant, Alan Barton, David Clarke and Barry Cashin

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q I have had a call from a disabled resident who passed her driving test a number of years ago and is keen to get back on the road. However, she is looking for a refresher course to boost her confidence. The enquiries she has made so far have been less than fruitful, having been advised that she will have to travel to Coventry from Stratford for such a service. Surely a case of discrimination, as everybody else wanting to access a driving instructor has a door-to-door service! I am struggling to find anybody in this area (south Warwickshire) who is fully qualified to teach in an adapted car and who could provide the service this lady is seeking. Any advice you are able to offer would be warmly welcomed.

Ann Catchpole, Social Inclusion Unit, Stratford-on-Avon District Council

● In some areas there is an acute shortage of approved driving instructors with the right training ●

EP: As you have discovered, in some areas there is an acute shortage of approved driving instructors with the right training and who have the appropriate adaptations fitted to their vehicle(s). If you need anything other than simple adaptations, such as basic hand controls, it can be really difficult to find an instructor with the right type of vehicle. The Forum of Mobility Centres is currently working with the Department for Transport and other stakeholders to improve the quality and quantity of tuition services across the UK. I'm surprised, though, that the instructor you've identified isn't willing to travel. Most recognise the difficulties and attempt to

provide a decent door-to-door service. The Mobility Centre at Carshalton provides training for driving instructors and maintains a national register of driving instructors who have undertaken this. They can be contacted on 020 8770 1151 or emailed at info@mobility-qe.org

It is also worth contacting your nearest Mobility Centre as they often work closely with local driving instructors and, in some cases, will provide tuition or vehicles themselves. Your nearest centre, Birmingham, has recently started running courses for driving instructors, so would be well worth contacting on 0845 3371540 or emailing at info@rdac.co.uk

The full list of Mobility Centres across the UK can be found at www.mobility-centres.org.uk or by ringing the national information line on 0800 559 3636. Motability are also worth a call. For example, they may be able

to assist young disabled people, aged 16 to 24 and in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance, with the cost of driving lessons, and have an arrangement with a UK-wide provider. They can be reached on 0845 456 4566.

Q I have an electric wheelchair, a Jazzy 1121. I have had it about a year or two. If I went to America, how do I go about recharging it? I lived there most of my childhood and they have a different electrical system and I would like to buy an adaptor or similar device and be sure it would work when I get there. If I have to go in an emergency I do not want to have to run around looking for an adaptor. I may be visiting the country soon. Also, if there was a problem with the wheelchair, how would I go about getting it repaired? I would be going

to a place just outside New York.
Maureen Sheehan,
London

AW: If you are considering taking an electric wheelchair to the USA, you will require the use of a transformer in order to cope with the difference in the voltage between the UK and the USA. A transformer is normally available for hire for approximately \$60-\$70 per week. The following web-link takes you to an American website, which provides details of suppliers near where you are staying www.accessable.com/dBase

These particular models are commercial grade 800-watt transformers and can be used to recharge batteries in power wheelchairs, battery-powered electric carts (ECV scooters) and other medical equipment. It is important to remember to bring your wheelchair battery-charger with you, as these transformers will not work without one. Should you have any mechanical difficulties with your electric chair, while in the USA, Accessible Travel can provide you with the contact details of a mobility specialist based around New York, which rents and repairs electric wheelchairs and scooters.



We would like to introduce a new member of our panel of experts. **Barry Cashin** is an expert on property and consumer issues, a columnist and editor, who has written for a number of national newspapers and magazines. During

his time as a columnist for *Bella* magazine, he won back more than £8.5 million in compensation for its readers. He has a chronic back condition.

→ If you have a question for our panel

- phone us 020 7619 7323
- write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

RELATIONSHIPS

SIMON PARRITT

Simon is a chartered counselling psychologist who has also studied psychosexual therapy. He was the only disabled director of the former Association to Aid the Sexual and Personal Relationships of People with a Disability (SPOD).

FINANCE

DAVID CLARKE

David has spent 14 years in the banking industry and has worked for three leading financial service providers. He is a senior partner of Clydesdale Bank.

PROPERTY

KATE SHEEHAN

Kate is a director of Better Living and an occupational therapist with 20 years' experience and a passionate interest in housing. Better Living works with manufacturers to meet the needs of the ageing population.

LEGAL & BENEFITS

LINDA CLARKE

Linda is director of Disability Law Service (DLS). DLS is the only service controlled and managed by disabled people that offers free legal advice to disabled people, families and carers.

EQUIPMENT

JOHN MANDRAK

John, who is blind, has worked in the disability sector for nearly 25 years, mainly as a disability journalist and consultant. He is an adviser on the Disabled Living Foundation's helpline.

TRAVEL

ANDY WRIGHT

Andy is a disabled travel industry professional with over 25 years' experience and is managing director of Accessible Travel, a specialist tour operator providing holidays for people with mobility impairments.

MOTORING

ED PASSANT

Ed is chief executive of the Forum of Mobility Centres. The centres provide driver and passenger assessment for disabled people across the UK.

MONEY, LEGAL AND OTHER PROBLEMS

ALAN BARTON

Alan is a social policy adviser for Citizens Advice, and an adviser at Rickmansworth Citizens Advice Bureau in Hertfordshire. He has a particular interest in benefits issues.

backchat

Worthless awards

 Having struggled to the end of the sticky, inaccessible morass that was 2007, Backchat thought it would be fitting to present some worthless awards to those who have left greasy fingerprints on the spotty face of history.

The Backchat Long-Service award: this should have gone to the Disability Rights Commission. Unfortunately, the DRC only managed a measly seven years before being summarily executed and replaced by an even more unmemorable acronym.

Most Amusing Spontaneous Combustion: who else but Heather Mills? After presenting a generally sensible account of herself in *Disability Now*, she took a large croquet mallet to her public image with a few wildly misjudged television interviews. Heather, what were you thinking?

Most Pointless Journey: Backchat understands that there was a good reason for yachtsman Geoff Holt to make his "Personal Everest" trek around the coast of the UK, but this information has sadly been lost, along with the hundreds of emails informing us of his interminable progress.

International Personality of the Year: it

could only be Ben Carpenter, the man taken on a hair-raising 50mph ride after his powerchair became trapped in the front grille of a lorry in Michigan, USA. His only complaint after his ordeal: he'd spilled his soda.

Most Accessible Service-Provider: the "young" working girl plying her trade in our notorious local park, who approached Backchat and his assistance dog to offer her services (which were politely declined).

Who says the DDA isn't working?

Ignorance is bliss

 For all those worried about disability hate crime, Backchat has some reassuring news.

When asked by *Disability Now* why their force seemed to be failing to target such offences, one police spokesman impressed us no end with the line: "Oh, sorry, what is a disability hate crime?"

But even more reassuring was the news that the Crown Prosecution Service will be training staff about the accurate recording of disability hate crime through "awareness-raising posters and postcards".

Oh, good. That should put a stop to all those nasty murders, robberies and kidnappings.

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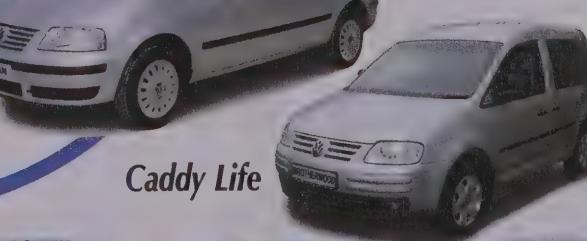
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That flaming Heat sticker!

Emma Bowler regrets that it has taken a bad-taste joke in a magazine give-away to put disabled children on the media agenda

Who on earth came up with the "hilarious" idea of including a sticker featuring Jordan's disabled son Harvey with the words "Harvey wants to eat me" on it in a collection of stickers in *Heat* magazine?

It takes a celebrity-induced fiasco to highlight issues affecting disabled children

For those off the celebrity gossip radar, Katie Price, aka Jordan, has a disabled son – Harvey – who has septo-optic dysplasia which amongst other things means he is visually-impaired and clinically obese, hence the "eat me" so-called "joke".

OK, Jordan isn't shy of a bit of publicity and consequently her whole family is in the public eye with a frequency that challenges the Beckhams, but is that necessarily a bad thing? She could have just hidden Harvey away and not highlighted the issues around having a

disabled child as she has done.

It's all very well Mark Frith, editor of *Heat*, apologising, saying no offence was intended, but how the heck did he think it wouldn't cause offence? Did *Heat* really think people would find it funny to take a dig at a disabled child?

What's all too apparent is that while people tread on eggshells when it comes to poking fun at people on the basis of race and religion, disability is still considered an easy target.

The worst thing about the *Heat* gaff is the fact it is so far away from picking on someone your own size it's untrue. As Liz Sayce, chief executive of RADAR, points out, "bullying of disabled people, especially children, is endemic".

Society's reticence to accept difference means disabled children who want to be included in it are cruelly pushed to its periphery.



Then here we have a mainstream magazine poking fun at a child who can't fight back, in a word – pathetic. It would be easy to dismiss this by saying, "What more would you expect from *Heat* magazine?" But 550,000

people buy it and many more read it. Its content presumably reflects the opinions of its readership – that's the worrying bit.

Thankfully, there are people who will fight the likes of Harvey's corner – dozens of people have complained to the Press Complaints Commission and Katie Price has made an official

complaint, which means they have to investigate it.

Ironically, it takes a celebrity-induced fiasco to highlight issues affecting disabled children, but at least the topic is getting a public airing and that is no bad thing.

→ Have your say

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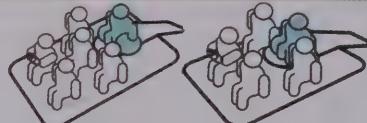
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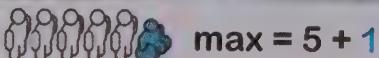
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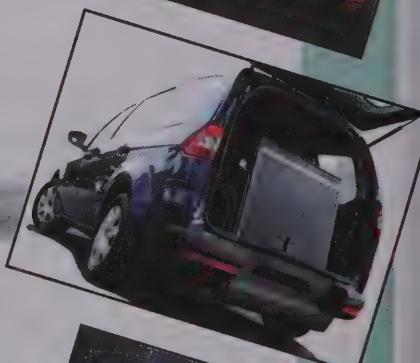
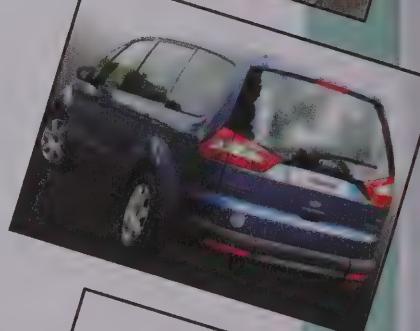
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Words of love and sex

Just because I am disabled, does not mean I cannot enjoy sex and write about it, says **Penelope Fleming-Fido**



aren't supposed to know what sex is, let alone write about it. According to popular opinion, sex is for young, healthy, able-bodied adults. It used to be that homosexuality was seen as beyond the pale; in modern days, the idea of people with disabilities thinking about, writing about, and especially having sex is far more of a taboo. From my point of view, I enjoy sex and take pleasure in writing about something I love. However, whilst I've written both heterosexual and lesbian erotica, I haven't yet made one of my main characters disabled. You wouldn't be able to tell that I was disabled from reading my writing, any more than you'd be able to tell I write erotica by admiring the detail on my wheelchair.

Sometimes this concerns me. I worry that I'm betraying disabled people by writing predominantly about able-bodied characters, especially given the prejudice we already face in this area. But then... I am a person first and foremost, not an illness – not a disability. In the same way that being happily married to a man doesn't prevent me from writing lesbian as well as heterosexual fiction, nor

does the fact that I've got ME mean that illness has to be there, visible, in everything I write.

At the same time, however, I don't want it to be something I hide,

I enjoy sex and take pleasure in writing about something I love

something I'm ashamed of. Yes, life would be easier if I were not disabled – but being disabled is part of

what makes me "me". In that sense, everything I write, everything I do, is affected by my health, even when I haven't made explicit reference to it.

So now's the time to stand proud (or perhaps, given the wheelchair, sit proud). I am disabled. I am sexy. I am utterly fulfilled in life. And, I hope, some day soon I will live in a world where it's possible to write characters who reflect that.

• **Penelope writes under the name Penelope Friday**

"Elizabeth dragged off her petticoat, which rustled sulkily as it dropped from her body. Lizzie's fingers were already fighting the stay laces. The time for slowness had passed; they were both too impatient, too frustrated, too needy. Skin against skin against skin; the chemise was ruthlessly tugged away and Lizzie collapsed onto the bed with Catherine, legs tangling suggestively; hands pulling in Catherine's hair; mouth warm and wet on her neck. Catherine arched her back, pushing her small, high breasts against Elizabeth, moaning at the delicious friction. "Kate – Kate!"

Lizzie was humming a continuous note of pleasure against Catherine's neck, the sound sending shivers through her. Catherine ran desperate, longing hands down Elizabeth's back, cupping her bottom and pulling her closer, always closer."

• Extract from **Beautiful Sin**, by Penelope Friday, contained in **Ultimate Sins**, available from www.xcitebooks.com
Editor's note: readers should be aware that this website contains content of an adult nature

Hello, I'm Penelope. I write erotica. Quick first impressions. What do you think I'm like? Now let me try again.

Hello, I'm Penelope. I'm disabled and I'm a wheelchair-user. Has your image changed, by any chance?

When people who know me as a wheelchair-user ask me what I do, I tell them that I write erotica. Often, they look surprised, and I hope it helps them realise that I am more than the chair I sit in; that just because I am disabled does not mean that I am not interested in sex.

People with disabilities

Shaping up to look good

Having a different body shape doesn't have to mean you're a fashion victim, says **Michael Shamash**

Fashion is seen as something marginal in the lives of disabled people. We look at the images of the catwalks in Paris, Milan and New York with emaciated bodies wearing histrionic clothing costing ludicrous sums and question how we can relate to this.

Yet, for many disabled people our impairments mean that we have far more in common with the catwalk than we could possibly imagine. Body shapes and sensory perceptions that heighten our profile and accentuate difference define us. I am not able to retreat into a world of anonymous conformity.

When I was a teen I bought a pink sweater. My father told me not to wear it as it made me conspicuous to which I replied that even if I wore the least flamboyant clothes, as a person of restricted growth I would always be very noticeable so I might just as well wear what I wanted.

I grew up in a fashion-conscious family and from an early age was aware of the power of clothing. Clothes are both camouflage and statement. They are both profound and



superficial. They show that we belong and yet we have our own independence of spirit. Clothes can provide us with any number of images to present to the world, drawing on a creative melting pot of influences. For example, you have a meeting. You could look neat and conventional or you could choose bright and assertive. Your clothes set the agenda.

Yet the relationship between the disabled person and fashion has historically been a tortuous one. Look at a picture of a residential

establishment and the disabled people would all be wearing similar clothes, dull colours, possibly striped. Garments were the symbol of subordination and control. Looking through archive photos of disabled people one sees elegant dignitaries patronising the dowdy disabled. Even in the post institutional era, clothes would be cast-offs frequently chosen by others.

Our appearance doesn't have to be something we're ashamed of, but could and should be a celebration of strength and dignity. The

fashion media has assiduously avoided suggesting that disabled people have any relationship with style. Disabled people were deemed too ugly. This orthodoxy was briefly challenged in the late '90s.

The style magazine Dazed and Confused in late 1998 had a fashion shoot of disabled people (above) wearing outfits designed by top fashion designers including Alexander McQueen, with the photography undertaken by Nick Knight, a doyen of

fashion shoots. These were stylish clothes presented in stylish images suggesting alternative ways of defining beauty. For a short period, there was interest in the idea that disabled people could be stylish and fashionable.

I became involved in an inclusive fashion show entitled, "In our Fashion", in 2001. This was organised in London by the arts access organisation, Artsline. Top designers would create designs for disabled models. It was an exciting period, with newspaper articles and radio broadcasts. Disability

fashion had become a serious issue with the clothing retail forum Awear being established in

Even if I wore the least flamboyant clothes, as a person of restricted growth I would always be very noticeable

Nottingham, and local organisations ran inclusive fashion shows. There was even the possibility that major retailers would start to address the issue.

This sadly amounted to

nothing. There has never been a major inclusive fashion show since and nor has a major style or fashion paper or magazine looked at disabled people as worthy of coverage. A lack of will and financial failure were the prime causes. "In our Fashion" was an honourable failure.

Things need to be done urgently to regain the lost momentum. Despite two Disability Discrimination Acts, little has been done to make the fashion retail environment any more inclusive or accessible. In many boutiques, style seems to equal stairs, poor

lighting and an absence of signage. Designers are still loath, with a few honourable exceptions, to use the challenges of different bodies and sensory perspectives in a challenging way that could have genuine applications for all.

Disabled people need to revel in our thrilling differences. The world may need redesigning but in the meantime let's celebrate by acknowledging our style and poise. Disabled people must be an equal part of a style-conscious world. Let's put on our glad rags and join the party.

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local knowledge



Kirklees and Coventry point way on hate crime

Two local projects are leading the way in combatting hate crime, says **Katharine Quarmby**

Now for some good news. In 2006, Disability Now reported on a new scheme to combat disability hate crime in Yorkshire. Kirklees Safer Communities Partnership opened four dedicated, accessible centres in Batley, Dewsbury and two in Huddersfield. The centres have trained staff who take reports and discuss how to press charges or refer problems to other agencies, such as housing associations. Victims are offered access to counselling services.

These are some of the first "third party" reporting centres for disability hate crime in the UK, and deal with all elements of hate crime –

including neighbour disputes, graffiti, arson, threatening behaviour, verbal abuse and bullying. Such crimes quickly escalate in severity. Reporting them early can prevent serious incidents.

Javier Santana-Acosta, the council's strategic diversity officer, says: "Most complaints have been neighbour disputes and other forms of lower level abuse, such as name-calling, harassment and bricks being thrown through windows. The more serious complaints go straight to the police and become formal investigations."

Extra cash from the Home Office will be used to train street wardens, social workers and police

community support officers to identify potential cases and deal with victims.

Together with improved marketing, this should improve reporting levels. "We are breaking down a historic lack of trust between disabled people and the police," he says. His centres have taken calls from disabled people living in areas that do not have third party reporting who are unwilling to go to the police.

David Quarmby (no relation), chairman of the Kirklees Disability Rights Network, says: "We have a long way to go. Most disabled people have experienced harassment and abuse that they just shake off and mostly don't report." Mr Quarmby is speaking from experience – a few years ago his guide dog was shoved down steps at Dewsbury railway station, causing him to fall too.

Another hate crime project, Havoc, run by people with learning difficulties in Coventry, has worked with West Midlands Police, local companies, the Crown Prosecution Service and Victim Support. It has run drama workshops for

people with learning difficulties (*pictured*) to help them understand their rights if they suffer a hate crime, has produced a training video for the emergency services and holds surgeries for disabled people who have been crime victims.

We are breaking down a historic lack of trust between disabled people and the police

Denise Stokes, who co-ordinated the three-year project, says that when the group started, "bullying and hate crime were becoming an accepted part of people's lives – most of the cases are slow and constant niggling, people getting picked on when travelling on public transport, being shouted at and so on". "What the police have now found is that hotspots where disabled people are being targeted are also hotspots for homophobic or race attacks. But many disabled people don't go out as much because they are frightened to do so. They don't want to put themselves in the firing line."

CONTACT US

Do you know of an innovative, small-scale, pilot project, ideally one run by disabled people themselves?

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Cruising: not all plain sailing

From my cabin I could just make out a silhouette that rose and fell gently into the sea against an increasingly pale orange sky. The MV Discovery had just anchored off the most remote and mysterious island on earth – Easter Island – and we had had to cross the South Pacific to get here, halfway between Chile and New Zealand.

In an hour I'd be climbing to the rim of Rano Kau, a volcanic crater lake, one kilometre across.

The island is known locally as Rapa Nui, so remote that you can even smell it from a distance: a mixture of soft, spongy earth and yellow grass, volcanic rock, and possibly horses; the few inhabitants travel around on horseback.

Easter Island is best known for its legendary moai, massive ceremonial stone figures that stare enigmatically inland from sacred platforms. Their origins remain a mystery, but it is believed that Peruvian craftsmen visited about 1,000 years ago with their superior tools and knowledge. The Polynesian locals dispute this, claiming that the sacred figures are the embodiment of their ancestors. In a single day, I visited seven sites, and the quarry where half-finished heads seem to emerge eerily from the ground. Lunch was an elaborate on-shore picnic beside the idyllic, white

Taking an ocean cruise is shaking off its tired image but is independence left ashore? Words and pictures by Marion Bull



beach, under swaying palms.

Cruising has shaken off its elderly image, and become one of the fastest-growing industries in the travel sector. There are voyages to suit all tastes, from round-the-world, to the "Cruise to Nowhere" – the sea breeze and luxury of being on-board with no ports of call is enough for some. Nearer home, take a no-fly cruise around the British Isles, or cruise the Mediterranean from Southampton. Arriving in Nice's old harbour and sailing past the legendary Hotel Negresco on the Baie des Anges evokes La Belle Epoque, and the cuisine aboard the MV Spirit of Adventure on its Mediterranean Odyssey lives up to the image. The cruise also takes in Monte Carlo, Pompeii, Malta, Sicily and Minorca. We even got a tour of the galley after dinner.

So how does cruising compare when it comes to accessibility? Passenger safety is the priority on board ship, so the environment can present a challenge. Sills on heavy doors opening on to deck are an obvious challenge for wheelchair-users; a simple ramp could be the answer. Facilities do vary from ship to ship, but many doors are now no-sill, level to deck.

There is currently no obligation on UK or international shipping companies to provide access onboard. Vessels are exempt from the transport code of practice on transport vehicles introduced by the Disability Rights Commission under the Disability Discrimination Act, so facilities vary. But

Did you know?

Easter Island received its name from Dutch sea captain Jacob Roggeveen, who became the first European to visit, on Easter Sunday, 5 April, 1722.



Left: some of the legendary moai on Easter Island; **above, top:** the MV Discovery; **above:** Rano Kau

as a matter of good practice, companies are encouraged to take account of the specific needs of passengers, and to make reasonable adjustments.

While vessels are exempt from the act, companies have a duty not to discriminate in respect of onshore activities, ie UK terminals' waiting areas, booking facilities, information and timetables must all be accessible.

Many larger cruise lines have adapted their ships to become more accessible in recent years, and positively encourage disabled passengers. However, when booking, you must ensure that everything you need will be available. Wide-door cabins and bathrooms should be at least 30" (76cm), with wheelchair-height mirrors, etc, and ask about cabin proximity to lifts. Most

ships only carry wheelchairs for emergency use. You should take your own folding one if applicable. All companies insist on a non-disabled travelling companion. Excursions are not always accessible for those who cannot board a tender boat independently, although Holland America line offers some accessible shore tenders. Ships are unable to accept assistance dogs.

The state-of-the-art QE2 has electronically opening sliding doors, level entrances to ballrooms, remote-controlled lights and curtains in cabins, but with less adventurous ports of call than some of the smaller ships.

P&O says it aims to make your stay as relaxing and comfortable as possible, with the entire fleet catering for mobility scooters as well as →

wheelchairs, and ships having accessible routes to the vast majority of public areas on board. Accessible cabins have wheel-in showers.

Saga's over-50 cruises on the user-friendly Saga Rose and Saga Ruby offer UK-wide departures including Liverpool and Newcastle, including a free private chauffeured car to port if you live within 75 miles. Some cabins are fully accessible, with low sills of less than an inch. Public rooms have no sills, and small ramps are placed in various doorways. They offer less strenuous excursions with panoramic coach tours for those with less mobility. Saga says wheelchair-users advise them that both ships are wheelchair-friendly in terms of giving them the independence to be able to get around without relying on others to assist them.

And Royal Caribbean (sister company is Celebrity Cruises) says: "With a wide range of easy access areas on board our ships, including flat, no-sill doors opening on to deck, braille on signs, specific lighting in cabins, and wide accessible lifts to all decks, we do everything within our power to ensure that disabled guests have a fantastic holiday."

Most ships can accommodate special dietary requirements, but you need to give full details when booking. You could be refused access to a cruise if you arrive without having fully informed the company of any special needs beforehand.

Deaf people should enquire about flashing light alarms, vibrating alarm clocks, textphone and TV subtitles, and

Did you know?

Easter Island is thought to be the most remote inhabited island in the world. Its nearest neighbour is Pitcairn Island, 1,260 miles away.



Ship shapes: on the MV Discovery

visible public address systems. I have seen no evidence of these on board the ships I have travelled on, although improvements are being made all the time. Just picture this: you arrive in your new, luxurious environment. It's relaxed, safe, hassle-free – your luggage has magically arrived in your cabin. Just as you are about to choose what to wear for dinner, an alarm sounds (unless you have no hearing at all). Everyone is called to muster stations at the very

• The seemingly high cost really covers several luxurious holidays in one •

moment they least want to go. They grapple (and are often photographed) with what appears to be a couple of orange polystyrene boxes – lifejackets. You must get to a muster station quickly, be counted, and answer when your name is read out (hugely embarrassing if you get there and simply don't hear it). Safety drill is obligatory on every ship upon embarkation, so it's vital to remind the crew that you are deaf. In my case, I had to leave the cabin door unlocked, so that I could be alerted by a steward. I was left wondering what might happen in a real emergency. It's hardly practical to leave the door open for the entire trip!

Otherwise, disruption is minimal, so you are free to look at the choice of events in the ship's news sheet each morning, choose one of several locations for breakfast, decide whether to go ashore, or simply relax on deck. You can take in a lecture, sit at the

poolside bar, go off on an organised excursion, or possibly head off on an adventure independently.

Book early for discounts from brochures or by internet. Last-minute availability may be cheaper but offers less choice. The seemingly high cost really covers several luxurious holidays in one: it's almost all-inclusive, and there is nothing more stress-free and wonderful than knowing that you have not got to worry about lifting heavy bags, packing and unpacking, having to bother locating hotels, negotiating with taxi-drivers, finding the tourist office, or spending all night looking for a good restaurant – in fact, all the tribulations that come with other types of holiday are absent. All you have to do is sit back and enjoy. ■

FACT FILE

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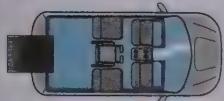
www.royalcaribbean.co.uk

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(information for disabled passengers)

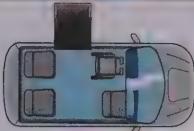
Berlitz Cruise Guide: £16.99 from travel bookshops

style versus city



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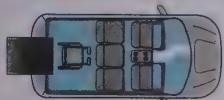
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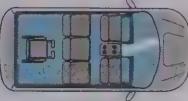


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Moving to the music

With podcasts, music and audiobooks, listening on the move has never been more popular. **Ian Macrae** tries out three portable media players

For lots of people, it's really quite simple. You go along to your favourite high street or online store and pick up the must-have gadget of the moment. This year that's likely to be the iPhone from Apple but, as we reported last month, if you're less than gimlet-eyed or nimble-fingered it's not worth getting it out of the box.

The first choice many disabled gadget geeks face is whether to go for a mainstream product or something which has been specially designed. Mainstream is likely to mean cheaper while specially made kit is generally easier to use and suited to our needs. It's also worth saying here that, although a lot of specially-made stuff is directly targeted at the visually-impaired market, it's my belief that other disabled people would



Tough player: the Victor Reader Stream is versatile and reliable

find it worth checking out.

The simplest, most usable MP3 player I've come across is the Zen Stone 1GB from Creative. It doesn't have a screen but it hardly needs one. When you plug it into your computer, it is recognised automatically as an extra drive and you can cut and paste music or audio books into it very easily. It's also amazing value for money with an RRP of about £28, but if you shop around on the web you'll certainly find it a lot cheaper – I've seen it for £17.

Screenless seems to be the order of the day on the bespoke side of the market. That's because the equipment is designed and

laid out to be operated by touch. A good example of this is the Book Courier from Springer Design, sold here by Computer Room Services for £225. Laid out like a phone keypad, each key is differently shaped to make it easily identifiable. In terms of what it offers, this is quite a box of tricks. You can listen to music MP3 files – although the stereo image is reversed for some reason – and you can also play audiobooks as MP3s or as downloads from www.audible.com, where it's recognised as a registered player. What makes it particularly attractive to visually-impaired users is its text-to-speech capability.

This means that you can import electronic text from computer files and have it read to you in one of half a dozen synthesised voices. Once you get used to it, this is less whacky than it sounds.

The latest arrival on the portable media player block is the Victor Reader Stream from multinational access-tech supplier Humanware. What people like about the Stream, which has all the versatility of the Book Courier, is its size, look and build. The Courier's rubberised keypad does become less reliable over time, but the Stream's is more robust. It will play a range of audio formats including MP3 and the one used for specially-produced talking books (such as those from the RNIB). It also does text-to-speech – opening-up access for any print-disabled people. Once again, for me it has huge potential to go beyond the community for which it was originally intended and designed.

- **Creative Zen Stone, £28, but widely available for less.**
- **Book Courier, £225 (www.comproom.co.uk)**
- **Victor Reader Stream, £190 (www.humanware.com)**

roadtest



PHILIP MYNOTT

Another problem is that the system relies very heavily on dealers making decisions on whether or not somebody fits the criteria. If eligibility were broadened to include everyone on HRMC, dealers could just be shown a qualifying document.

A spokesman for HM Revenue and Customs said: "Formal VAT agreements with our European partners – signed by successive governments – mean that we cannot extend this relief. However, any disabled person, whether a wheelchair-user or not, is eligible for VAT relief on adaptations made to a vehicle to suit their condition."

However, Mobilise chair Douglas Campbell says: "The criteria for VAT relief does need to be looked at as there are far too many anomalies, but I wouldn't want the qualifying criteria to be just HRMC as it would exclude some people, including those who become disabled after the age of 65. Mobilise will be bringing this to the attention of the Treasury".

The current system is also wide open to abuse: this summer, six disabled people were arrested for alleged involvement in a scam involving tax-free sales of luxury cars. No charges have yet been brought.

Clearly VAT relief on vehicles needs a complete overhaul.

Driven to VAT distraction

Helen Smith says the rules on VAT relief for adapted vehicles need a shake-up

In 2001, the law was changed to allow disabled people to buy adapted motor vehicles without paying VAT. This means a saving of 17.5 per cent, but only if you fit the very strict criteria. To qualify for VAT relief, you must either be "a disabled person who normally uses a wheelchair or stretcher to be mobile" or "a disabled person with a degenerative condition, such as multiple sclerosis, who does not need to use a wheelchair all the time, but only when the condition requires it". The rules also state that "a mobility scooter is not a wheelchair for VAT purposes".

To qualify for a Motability car, you need to receive either the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance (HRMC) or war pensioner's mobility

supplement. To receive these benefits, you are deemed to have walking difficulties but not necessarily be reliant on a wheelchair to get about.

Surely qualification should be on disability, not how you get about

So someone could qualify for HRMC but by HM Revenue and Customs standards not be disabled enough to qualify for VAT relief on their adapted vehicle. This is the case for Jim Rawlings from Norwich, who had a stroke in 1994. Although he doesn't use a wheelchair, he finds walking difficult and uses a stick.

He says: "I think the qualifying criteria for this exemption is bonkers. I receive HRMC but because I

want to keep walking for as long as I can, I'm effectively being penalised by HM Revenue and Customs for keeping active. Surely qualification should be on disability, not how you get about."

Marianne Tharby is a double-arm amputee, drives a heavily adapted car and also doesn't meet the criteria.

If the criteria were to change to encompass everyone who receives HRMC, this would not only include ambulant disabled people but also enable people who choose mobility scooters over wheelchairs to be eligible. I know of one lady who had polio, cannot walk at all, and uses a scooter to get about. When she buys a car she has to borrow a wheelchair to avoid the dealer charging her VAT.

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Wheelchair stars collect awards

The talents of some of Britain's top wheelchair sports stars were recognised at the WheelPower British Wheelchair Sports Awards.

Among the recipients of awards at the ceremony held at Reading's Madejski stadium in November were wheelchair basketball players Simon Munn and Clare Strange, and recently retired wheelchair tennis player Jayant Mistry.

Mistry shared the award for lifetime achievement with Colin Price, who captained the GB wheelchair basketball team to the Olympic final in Atlanta in 1996.

Munn took the outstanding male achievement award for his role in his side's silver medal win at the European Championships, where he was also named best four-point player.

Like Munn, Strange was also recognised for her European Championship performance, where the women came home with a bronze medal.

Elsewhere, there were awards for the GB wheelchair rugby team and the Great Britain junior tennis team, among others.



GRAHAM BOOL

Colin Price (right) with Clare Strange and Simon Munn

Full list of winners:

Norwich Union Junior Award:	Jack Pegram	Team of the Year in a Team Sport:	GB Wheelchair Rugby Team
Best Newcomer:	Rachel Morris	Special Recognition Award:	Great Britain Junior Tennis Team
WheelPower Media Award:	Tony Garrett	Outstanding Male Achievement:	Simon Munn
Coach of the Year:	Steve Palmer	Outstanding Female Achievement:	Clare Strange
Service to Wheelchair Sport:	John Jenkins	Award for Lifetime Achievement:	Jayant Mistry and Colin Price
Team of the Year in a Team Event:	GB Ladies Compound Archery Team		

Beijing place for CP Lions

England's cerebral palsy (cp) football team secured a place at the Beijing Paralympics after finishing seventh at the cp seven-a-side World Championships in Brazil.

Despite competing in temperatures into the 90s, the team qualified after overcoming the Republic of Ireland 6-1 in their seventh and eighth place play-off match in Rio de Janeiro.

Two goals apiece from Wayne Ward and Michael Barker, along with strikes from Richard Fox and Andy Taylor, saw England confirm their superiority.

The cp team's qualification follows that of the England blind team, who qualified back in October (*Disability Now November 2007, Sport Now*).

Both sides will compete as Great Britain in Beijing, marking the first time a Great Britain football team has competed at the Paralympics since Barcelona in 1992.

Phil Lane, chief executive of Paralympics GB, said: "I'd like to congratulate the team on this achievement."

Paralympics GB is delighted to be able to take two British football teams to the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games, which is a great sign for the sport ahead of the home Games in London in 2012."

Q&A: Danny Crates

In the first of a series of profiles ahead of the Beijing Paralympics, we caught up with 800m champion Danny Crates (pictured right).

How did you first get involved in disability sport?

I was already playing rugby as an amputee, when people from BALASA contacted me. I went along to a squad day and heard stories of what it was like to represent your country and a dream came alight inside.

What is your biggest sporting achievement?

Athens, to win gold after seven years of training. I had 30 friends and family out there. That really was the pinnacle.

What are your ambitions for Beijing?

Obviously to go out there and defend my title. I have a son now, and I'd like to win for him. Other than that, just to try and enjoy the Games, the experience and be

satisfied whatever the result, although I'm set on gold.

Do you think the GB team is in good shape?

There's new talent coming through, but we're not as strong as we'd like. I'm not saying GB has gone backwards, it's just the rest of the world has moved forward and caught up.

What do you think of Oscar Pistorius' Olympic bid?

Oscar's a really nice guy, and I don't dispute his dream, but you have to be realistic. He knows the reasons why



he can't do it. I think he's pushed it a little too far and has to be careful. We all have dreams, he just has to not let it ruin him.

Hertfordshire Family Finding Team are urgently seeking an adoptive family for Annabel

Annabel has a beautiful smile and giggle, and she is generally contented and interested in the world. Her foster carer describes her as "a lovable girl who is rewarding to care for, given time and patience". Annabel enjoys attention but is undemanding and can amuse herself with toys. She particularly likes banging her drum, looking at herself in the mirror and jiggling about to music.

Annabel has a rare chromosomal disorder and is significantly developmentally delayed, including in her speech. She babbles and is learning to sign. Annabel can lift her head up but is not yet able to sit. She has a standing frame to help strengthen her legs. Annabel needs lots of time to feed. She has just started to attend a play group for children with disabilities.

Ethnic / Racial Origins: white British, Christian (Church of England)

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artsreview

THEATRE

With the Christmas show season in full swing, **Katharine Quarmby** enjoys a classic Dickens tale at Chickenshed, while **Nuala Calvi** has mixed feelings about *Beauty and the Beast* at the Lyric Hammersmith



Charming: the Cratchits in Chickenshed's *A Christmas Carol*

A Christmas Carol

The Chickenshed theatre company, with its unique brand of "inclusive" theatre, is well known for its ebullient, crowd-pleasing shows. Its brand-new version of *A Christmas Carol* is no exception.

Chickenshed's version of Charles Dickens' well-loved classic is pretty faithful to the Victorian original. Scrooge remains his usual lugubrious and tight-fisted self. But Chickenshed plays *A Christmas Carol* in a jolly key, as befits a young audience.

The ghosts vamp it up (the cartwheeling ghost of Christmas Present, played by Gavin May, lights up the show) and the chain-shaking ghost of Jacob Marley, played by Peter Dowse, bears an unmistakeable resemblance to Edward Scissorhands and

never frightens anybody, except Scrooge. The Cratchits, with their 100 children all kitted out in warm winter colours, charm their way through the proceedings – although I felt the absence of the Tiny Tim plot line, which adds depth to the story of Scrooge's redemption; but leaving him out is understandable in this context.

The choreography is fluid and elegant and there is a joyousness about the dancing that moves the audience to spontaneous applause. The final song, *The End of It*, with the entire company of around 160 players on stage, all signing, is a fitting way to get into the Christmas spirit.

• Until 12 January. From £9. Tel: 020 8292 9222, www.chickenshed.org.uk

Beauty and the Beast

Told By An Idiot, the anarchic company behind two former Lyric shows – *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* and *Aladdin* – displays some inspired casting in its production of *Beauty and the Beast*, featuring a multicultural troupe headed by the short actress Lisa Hammond.

Zipping around the stage teaching the Beast to "go electric" in her power-chair, Hammond (Belle) sets the tone for a feisty, comic version of the classic tale and provides a refreshing challenge to traditional ideals of female beauty.

Her evil siblings, easily the highlight of the show, include the delightfully camp Boris (Dharmesh Patel), more concerned about his white moccasins than the loss of the family home, and the hideous Brioche, played with panache by Nick Haverson.

The production has more than a few touches of playful surrealism, notably in scenes at the Beast's castle, where arms come out of walls to

brush Belle's hair and wine glasses are magically filled on command.

But designer Michael Vale fails to create something lavish for Christmas, instead delivering a set based on what looks like two giant concrete breeze blocks.

Meanwhile, the show's musical content – two songs, one of which is repeated – is disappointing and poorly delivered.

Children are ignored by the cast when they shout, "He's behind you" at plausible moments, and let down by a production that is too self-conscious to deliver any full-hearted festive fun.

• Until 5 January. Lyric Hammersmith. From £10. Tel: 08700 500 511, www.lyric.co.uk



Feisty: Lisa Hammond as Belle

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webwatch

Reading the news

A new report compares the accessibility of national newspaper web sites. **Sunil Peck** reports

The website www.journalism.co.uk has published a series of articles looking at the accessibility of eight national newspaper websites. So who scoops the honours when it comes to accessibility?

Visually-impaired news junkies tested each site for accessibility in terms of finding and reading news stories, viewing video clips and posting on blogs.

A person with some vision might be drawn to the top story on *The Sun's* site because of its font and colour. But somebody relying on screenreading software for audio feedback could find the same site awkward because of the number of links and sidebars.

But a website will never be 100 per cent accessible to everyone. And, while one blind screenreader-user can find a site accessible, another might not. This could be because of the sophistication of the software they use or their ability to use it properly.

One tester who uses



Side issue: sidebars on *The Sun's* website can be a problem

screen magnification software praised *The Telegraph* for its multimedia content which, he said, made the news more accessible. But he had some gripes about reading the blogs, because the pages were too long and the print font too small.

The first link a blind user of the *Daily Mail's* site will see provides the option to skip over links for adverts and to other sections of the paper. When activated, the cursor is supposed to land at the top of the news section. It might not always

work, but it's a good idea.

The *Daily Express* has no such option and can appear cluttered. A lot of the links, according

A website will never be 100 per cent accessible to everyone

to the screenreader-user who tested the site, are labelled badly.

It's easy enough to

pinpoint stories on *Times Online*, but after clicking the link to the article, it can be tricky to find the beginning of the text.

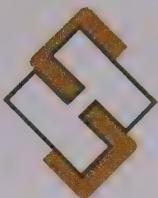
People with some sight might also find it easier to navigate and read content on *The Sun's* website, particularly because of the layout and the size of the text.

The Daily Mirror's site was OK to browse, but could do with sprucing up, while *The Independent* has a tool to resize fonts, which the testers found useful.

Richard Warren, technical director at the website auditors USERITE, says: "In an ideal world, the internet versions of newspapers would not try to mimic their paper-based editions, but would, instead, maximise the potential of internet technology to deliver the news in an easy-to-follow, well-organised and interesting format. The golden rule is keep it simple."

→ Have your say

- write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



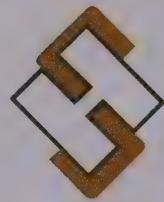
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Rapkyns Care Centre opened 2 new bungalows in

January 2007. The home is based in Broadbridge Heath and caters for young people with complex and multiple needs. The home comprised of three bungalows for ten people and one for eleven which are purpose built and fully accessible for wheelchairs. Each single room provides en-suite facilities and track hoisting is available throughout. There is one bed available for respite care. There is a day centre on site with swimming pool and IT suite. Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy are available to service users as is 24 hour nursing care. A Speech and Language Therapist is also employed.

Beech Lodge is a purpose built bungalow which provides two wings of 10 bedrooms all with en-suite facilities providing care for young adults with multiple and complex needs. The registered care home with nursing has been equipped with all the latest technological aids and provides a safe, comfortable, homely environment for our service user's. Person centred planning is at the forefront of our philosophy with the service user's needs and wishes at the centre of our service. Our philosophy is to provide the very best care in a safe and comfortable environment whilst respecting service user's rights to live as normal a life as possible.

Sussex Health Care also currently have residential vacancies in two of our care homes:

Both **Norfolk Lodge** and **Redwood House** have been skilfully converted to accommodate 8 people in each home and offer a specialised residential environment for adults with learning disabilities who may also present with moderately challenging behaviour. Person centred planning is at the forefront of our philosophy with the service users needs and wishes at the centre of our service. Our philosophy is to provide the very best care in a safe and comfortable environment whilst respecting service user's rights to live as normal a life as possible.

In 2008 the group are developing 2 new purpose built facilities

Beechcroft Care Centre, West Hoathly Road, East Grinstead.

This service will provide 2 purpose built 10 bedded bungalows with track hoisting throughout and en-suite facilities to all rooms for people with physical and learning disabilities. The home will also have its own hydrotherapy pool and a separate swimming pool. Trained nurses, keyworkers and physiotherapists will be available over a 24 hour period. This service is due to open in May 2008.

Horncastle Care Centre, Plawhatch Lane, Sharphorne, East Grinstead.

This service will provide a purpose built residential service with 24 hour nursing support for people with acquired brain injury and neurological conditions. This service is due to open in May 2008.

For further information

Please contact Corrine Wallace, Head of Specialist Care Services and Future Development,

Tel: (01403) 217338 • Fax: 01403 210424 • email: corrine.wallace@sussexhealthcare.org • web: www.sussexhealthcare.org



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



backlash



It appears that winter is well and truly here. The most inaccessible season of all looks like it's hitched up for the foreseeable, condemning us to weeks of slipping and sliding about, while pretending to passers-by that that's actually how we always do things.

For me, though, this time of year poses its own problems. No, not the ice. Nor is it the fact that small children begin mistaking me for a "funny elf".

My winter gripe is that I get hassled by Jacket Wardens. You've probably never heard of them. After all, I just made them up. But these are people – usually middle-aged women (although, like the devil, they can take many forms) – who find it incomprehensible that someone would even think about stepping into the inner-city tundra without wearing at least six layers of clothing, three of which are thermal.

These people see fit to accost me in the street. "Aren't you cold?" they coo. "You must be freezing." "Haven't you got a coat?" As if these questions will flick the switch of realisation and

Winter warmers? No thanks

Paul Carter always dreads the annual appearance of the Jacket Wardens



ANNA SCHOENBORN/REX FEATURES

I'll suddenly discover the onset of hypothermia.

You see, I've never felt the cold. My body temperature seems to operate around three degrees higher than everyone else's. (A quick look at Wikipedia informs me that if that were true I'd be medically dead, but it is true that I could defrost a walk-in freezer.)

Now as far as I'm aware, north London isn't prone to being struck down by sub-Arctic blizzards. Hell, I'm not even sure if the Arctic is prone to sub-Arctic blizzards these days. Al Gore's probably up there now having a barbecue in a Hawaiian shirt and flip-flops.

I was actually double-teamed the other day. There

I was, minding my own business, on my way to the supermarket to look all metrosexual and self-important by mooching over some organic Hungarian cress, when a mother and daughter ambushed me. I thought I was about to be dragged into the nearest C&A and

The fact that I tend not to shave from one week to the next makes me look like some sort of hobo Ewok

smothered in some ill-fitting, garish cagoule. I don't know if C&A even exists anymore, but I could

see in their eyes that they would have found one.

Can you imagine if this became normal? Umbrella Wardens on every street corner and fixed penalty notices for anyone setting foot inside the borough of Westminster without immediate access to a scarf.

It must be the fact that I'm small that brings out this strange habit in people, like some sort of perverse maternal instinct. Either that or the fact that I tend not to shave from one week to the next makes me look like some sort of hobo Ewok, who has fallen on hard times.

I usually just laugh politely at these people. The kind of laugh you do in a lift when someone you barely know says something just to break the actually-in-no-way-awkward silence, but despite the fact that you find it crushingly unfunny and you want to assault them with the nearest blunt object because you haven't had your first three cups of coffee yet, you chuckle anyway out of politeness. That laugh.

On that note, I'll wish you all a merry Christmas. Make sure you wrap up warm now.

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Driving Google's search for access

He describes himself as an "access evangelist". Google's TV Raman talks us though a career spent looking for access alternatives

I'm originally from India, although I now live in California. When people asked me about my name I explain that the T comes from the first letter of my home town and the V from my father's name. That seems pretty cool to me.

I've always been interested in and fascinated not just by numbers, but mathematical concepts. So I studied maths to a high level at the Indian Institute of Technology where, in 1987, I took my first class in computer programming. Even then,

maths and science were big in India. By 1990, I'd moved to America to study at Cornell University. It was at that point I had a big "Aha!" moment and realised not only that I wanted to move properly across from purely abstract maths to computing, but also that I was beginning to think of myself as an "accessibility evangelist". So I did a PhD in computer science.

At Cornell, I developed a very good and intuitive way of making maths documents talk for my own

purposes but when I graduated from there and went to work at Deck Research I decided to concentrate on the bigger access picture. This now starts to get a bit technical. Screenreaders look at visual information and try to turn it into audio. I wanted to get at the information itself and make it talk, so working from the inside rather than the outside. I started quite simply by developing a talking computer-based calendar. My starting point was saying to the calendar, "look, guy, I'm listening to you, talk to me," but it was the thing itself that was talking without any extra software intervention.

By 1995, Adobe's PDF format was being increasingly widely developed but there were huge problems in terms of its accessibility. Adobe asked me to go and work for them to sort out

problems with it for blind people. For four years, I did a lot of work on the structure of PDF files. After I left, people continued to work with the PDF format so that the majority of PDF documents are now much more accessible.

Then, from 1999, I worked at IBM, looking at improving access to parts of the web, concentrating in particular on how online forms you're asked to fill in could be made more usable. In 2005, I came here to Google. What I like about being here is that Google hires a bunch of smart people and just throws them in the fish tank. So I've worked on something called Accessible Search, which will take you directly to user-friendly accessible sites.

I'm not content with the status quo. I believe that the computer industry hasn't created enough alternatives. Users need alternatives.

TV RAMAN: CAREER PATH

- Indian Institute of Technology studying maths and computer programming
- Cornell University, PhD in computer science, began work on speech access to information
- Deck Research, built first talking calendar
- Adobe, working on

making PDF formats more accessible

- IBM, improving access to parts of the web
- Google, where he developed the accessible search facility which automatically selects particularly accessible and user-friendly sites

Make a difference to people's lives

The Motability Scheme assists disabled people with their mobility needs by enabling them to obtain a car, powered wheelchair or scooter. It has 480,000 customers and, in the past 30 years, has provided two million vehicles. As a registered charity, Motability also raises funds to help customers who couldn't otherwise afford the mobility solution they need. Additionally, it administers the Government's fund that provides grants to those needing complex vehicle conversions for wheelchair access. Last year a total of £13 million was awarded to over 5,000 customers.

The Scheme is being continually improved - take a look at www.motability.co.uk Right now, the work of the Grants area is being refocused to deliver even better service. As a result, two superb career opportunities are available, based at Harlow in Essex.

GRANTS DIRECTOR

c. £67,500 + benefits

Heading a knowledgeable, capable group of 40 multi-skilled staff in two departments, you'll bring leadership, fresh thinking and energy to develop and deliver the strategies needed to enhance customer service and improve processes.

It's a stimulating mix of strategic big-picture direction, whilst keeping an eye on important detail. Your career will therefore demonstrate success in comparable roles with people focused, service orientated organisations.

Both roles need proactive, creative leaders with excellent communication and influencing skills, and the ability to initiate and implement change. You'll also demonstrate real commitment to meeting the mobility needs of disabled people and delivering great customer service.

Please send your full CV (stating the role you are applying for and including current salary details) preferably by email to our consultant, Andrew Burke at: dn@aegis-er.com or post to him at Aegis Executive Resourcing, Winchester House, Alresford SO24 9QH.



MOBILITY SOLUTIONS MANAGER

c. £43,500 + benefits

Reporting to the Grants Director, you'll lead a team of 12 who assess customers' needs, advise on complex solutions, award grants for them, provide technical support and handle supplier relationships.

With a proven ability to manage multi-discipline experts, you will have a good understanding of disability issues, perhaps gained from an OT, mobility services or vehicle adaptations career.



Pobl wahanol. Gwerthoedd cyffredin.

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Mae ein Gr p Ymwybyddiaeth a Chymorth Anabledd, sef fforwm rhwydweithio, yn cwrdd bob mis i drafod newyddion a chynnydd ar faterion anabledd. Mae'r siaradwyr yn dod o amryw isadrannau i drafod materion cyfreol perthnasol ynghylch anabledd.

Mae Llywodraeth Cymru yn sefydliad Buddsoddwyr mewn Pobl ac yn gyflogwr Cyfleoedd Cyfartal.

Caiff swyddi gwag eu postio ar ein gwefan www.cymru.gov.uk/recruitment pan fyddant yn codi.

Different people. Same values.

The Welsh Assembly Government is determined to ensure we promote and maintain an environment that appreciates diversity and is free from discrimination, harassment and bullying.

We have the 'DAAS' (Disability Awareness And Support Group) networking forum who meet monthly to discuss disability news and progress. Speakers are brought in from various divisions to discuss relevant current issues regarding disability.

The Welsh Assembly Government is an Investor in People organisation and an Equal Opportunities Employer.

When vacancies arise they will be posted on our website www.wales.gov.uk/recruitment



classifieds

RECRUITMENT

John Grooms HA is a Christian charity providing wheelchair accessible housing.

Our aim is to enable disabled people and their families to live more independent lives. We are passionate about providing accessible housing and delivering excellent tenancy services. JGHA has entered into an exciting new partnership with the recently merged Grooms-Shrewsbury charity to provide better services for people and communities affected by disability and disadvantage.

Trustees

We are looking for two new Board Trustees. We particularly need people with experience of asset management, housing and supported housing, as well as governance, fundraising and business skills and an interest in or personal experience of disability.

JGHA is a Christian organization. Trustees and senior staff are required to be practising Christians (a Genuine Occupational Requirement under the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) 2003 applies).

For an informal chat, further information and a recruitment pack contact Sue Goode, Vice Chair of JGHA 07912 396777 sutton@johngrooms.org.uk or 0115 9640616 or Richard@johngrooms.org.uk or Tim Fallon, Chief Executive of JGHA 07912 396777 tfallon@johngrooms.org.uk

Closing date: 04/01/08 Interviews for Trustees will be organised in January
www.johngrooms.org.uk



WARNING

We have been warned about a scam involving people from overseas who say they want to buy a product and who offer to pay using cheques, Western Union money transfers and certified cheques.

Although no *Disability Now* readers to our knowledge have been hit by this, please be particularly wary of accepting cheques from overseas. For more information, visit the Metropolitan Police website.

RECRUITMENT



A leading player in the national special education arena, it incorporates a residential special School, a specialist College for young people with complex physical disabilities and the Moving On in the Community Programme. The College was awarded Beacon status in 2004 and both School and College are recognised centres of expertise. The Trust as a whole is forging alliances with new partners and local authorities to take our vision across the country and meet the needs of many more young people and families.

In celebrating our Centenary, the Trust has committed to a major investment programme, which promises a dynamic and exciting 21st century as an acknowledged brand leader and a voice for young disabled people.

Appointment of Trustees and Governors Unremunerated

Alton, Hampshire

The Trust would welcome people with senior management experience at a strategic level in education - from local authorities, government, schools or further education - and also those with experience of working with disabled young people. The time commitment is about one to two days per month. Treloar's is looking for committed individuals who have a demonstrable track record of achievement and success in their chosen career. These positions offer a real opportunity to strengthen the strategic vision of an organisation that is an acknowledged leader in its field.

Please download further details of the position and apply online to Richard Evans at www.cfappointments.com

Closing date for applicants: 16 January 2008
 Initial interviews: w/c 21 January 2008
 Tour of Treloar's: February 2008
 Final panel interviews: February/March 2008

For more information about Treloar's visit
www.treloars.org.uk



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DEADLINE - *Disability Now*

February published 26 January. Classified deadlines: Booking: 7 January. Copy: 9 January.

HOLIDAYS



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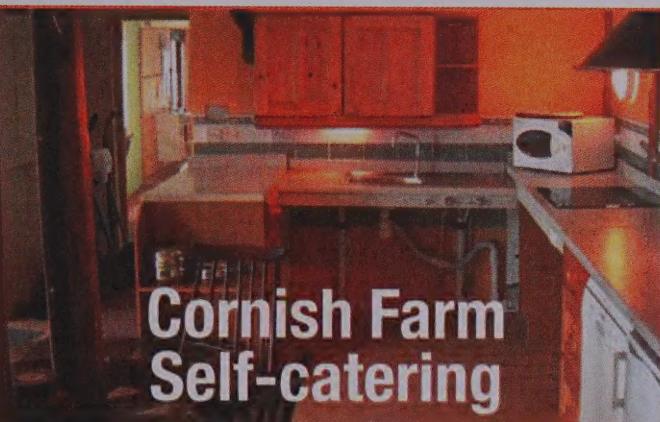
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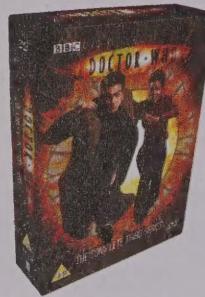
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54 Scudo Montana 2.0 Turbo Diesel (J7267), 20,000 miles, Low floor, Lightweight ramp, £12,250

53 Mercedes V-Class SWB 220 CDI (J7420), 27,000 miles, Auto, Low floor, Lightweight ramp, £14,995

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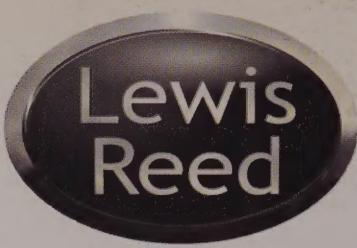
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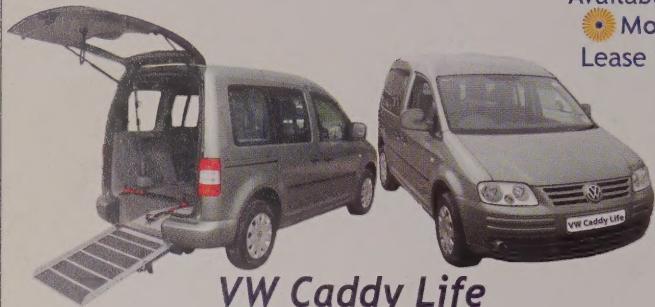
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